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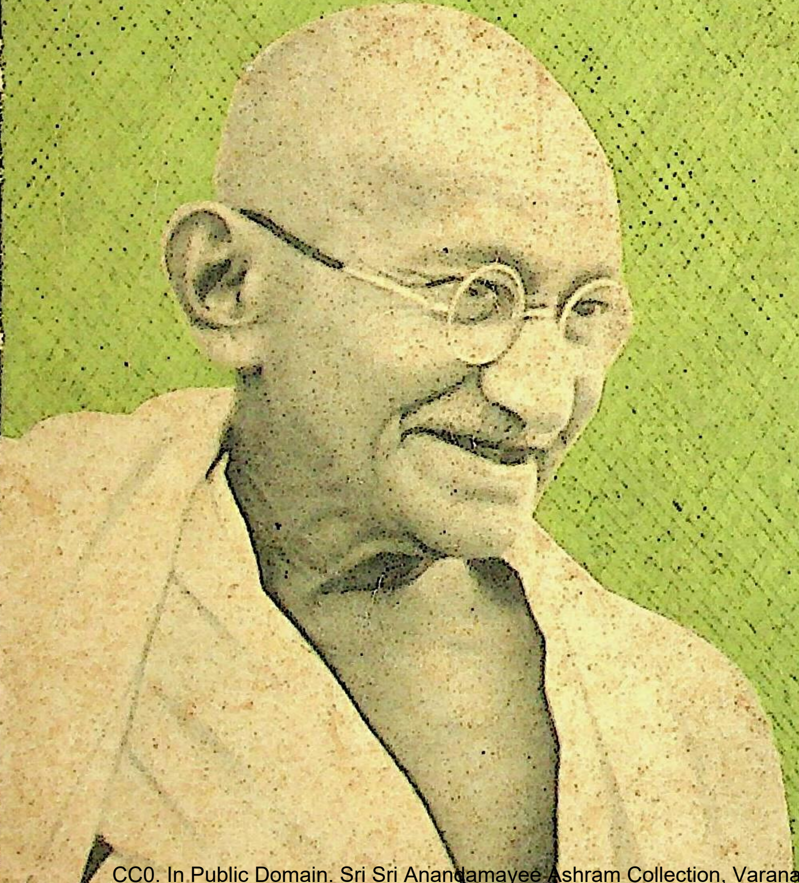
GITA-MY MOTHER

M. K. GANDHI



GITA—MY MOTHER

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By

M. K. GANDHI

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By

ANAND T. HINGORANI

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PREFACE

FROM his very early childhood, Gandhiji had felt the need of a book that could serve him as an unfailing guide in the trials and temptations of life. A close and reverent study of the *Gita*, during his student days in London, had revealed to him not only the beauty and the charm and the loftiness of its teaching, but also shown him the way of putting that teaching into actual practice. In the course of time, the *Gita* came to cast such a magic spell over him that it became for him a Book of Life, a Guiding Star, a Spiritual Light-house, nay, even more than that—his Mother. "I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth, long ago," he says, "but this Eternal Mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom." Paying yet another tribute to the solace-giving power of the *Gita*, he says: "When doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not a ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me, and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow."

But Gandhiji does not claim the *Gita* to be his Mother only. To him, she is the Universal Mother who turns away nobody and whose door is wide open to anyone who knocks. Only the knocking has to be done by her votary in all humility of spirit and complete faith. "There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed," he declares. Singing the praises of the *Gita* again and again he says: "She is a wonderful Mother. She has been likened to the sacred cow—the giver of all desires. Hence, Mother. Well, that Immortal Mother gives all the milk we need for spiritual sustenance, if we would approach her as babes seeking and sucking it from her. She is capable of yielding milk to her millions of babes from her exhaustless udder."

Apart from thus considering the *Gita* as a Mother, Gandhiji also looks upon her in the light of a Teacher who ever presents him with new lessons. The message of the *Gita* to him is as simple, beautiful and soulful, as its appeal is universal. Man's ultimate object is to become like unto God and the effort to reach this state is self-realization. This self-realization is the very theme of the *Gita* which also shows us the most excellent way of attaining it. The *Gita* propounds three gospels—the gospel of work, the gospel of devotion, and the gospel of knowledge. In Gandhiji's view, life should be a harmonius whole of these three, but the gospel of service is the basis of all. Where there is body, there must be action; and as all action, however trivial it may be, binds and is tainted with sin, it becomes a problem how to achieve freedom from its bondage. Here the *Gita* comes forward to solve this spiritual tangle for us. It teaches us that we have a right to action only, but not to the fruit thereof. It says: "Do your allotted work, but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward, and work." In short, it enunciates a principle of desireless action on which all our human conduct must be based. "By renouncing fruits of action, by dedicating all activities to God, *i.e.*, by surrendering oneself to Him, body and soul," one can be free from the bondage of action and thus attain self-realization.

Renunciation of the *Gita*, however, does not mean that there should be no fruit for the one who renounces, but it simply means "absence of hankering after fruit." Nor does it mean giving up all action. Explaining this doctrine of renunciation further, Gandhiji states: "I hold that renunciation should be sought for in and through action. That action is *sine qua non* of life in the body, that the wheel of life cannot go on even for a second without involving some sort of action, goes without saying. Renunciation can, therefore, in these circumstances, only mean detachment or freedom of the spirit from action, even while the body is engaged in action. A follower of the path of renunciation seeks to attain it not by refraining from all activity, but by carrying it on in a perfect spirit of detachment and altruism as a pure trust."

Thus, a man desirous of attaining self-realization should perform all acts in a selfless spirit and without any taint of egoism or attachment. And one who does so, naturally cannot indulge in such evil acts as murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like, for they presuppose selfishness and attachment in their performance and are as such taboo for a devotee of the *Gita*. Thinking on these lines, Gandhiji feels that one who tries to act in accordance with the teaching of the *Gita*, cannot but follow Truth and *Ahimsa* because "when there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *himsa*." For such a one, he says that his life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

The *Gita* is thus for all of us, too, a Teacher as well as a Mother. Whilst as a Teacher there is not a single spiritual dilemma that she cannot solve, as a Mother she never fails to give us the required consolation whenever we feel like seeking it of her. We should only have faith that "with our head in her lap, we shall always remain safe."

ANAND T. HINGORANI

7, Edmonstone Road,
Allahabad.
March 18, 1965.

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CHAPTER I

MOTHER GITA

THE *Gita* has been a Mother to me ever since I became first acquainted with it in 1889. I turn to it for guidance in every difficulty, and the desired guidance has always been forthcoming. But you must approach *Mother Gita* in all reverence, if you would benefit by her ministrations. One who rests his head on her peace-giving lap, never experiences disappointment but enjoys bliss in perfection. This spiritual Mother gives her devotee fresh knowledge, hope and power every moment of his life. The *Gita* is not one among the Hindu scriptures, but it is the distilled essence of all the Hindu scriptures put together; and if one assimilates it thoroughly, I would make bold to say that one need not read any other of the many Hindu books known as scriptural. You can even easily commit its 700 verses to memory, and then the *Gita* would be your companion in life and in death, even if you are deprived of the printed pages.[1]

Early in my childhood, I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as an unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. The *Vedas* could not supply that need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the *Gita*, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the *Shastras* and the *Upanishads*. That decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the *Gita*. To-day, the *Gita* is not only my *Bible* or my *Quran*; it is more than that—it is my Mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago; but this Eternal Mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom.

Often, in the course of my struggle against untouchability, I am confronted with conflicting opinions delivered by doctors of learning. Some of them tell me that untouchability, as it is practised to-day, has no sanction in Hinduism and they bless my efforts to eradicate it; but there are some others who maintain that untouchability has been an essential part of Hinduism from the very beginning. Which authority should I follow under the circumstances? I feel absolutely at sea. The *Vedas* and the *Smritis* are of no avail to me. I then approach the Mother and say: "Mother, these learned *Pandits* have put me in a predicament. Help me out of my perplexity." And the Mother, with a smile, says in reply: "The assurance held out by me in the Ninth Chapter is not meant for the *Brahmins* only, but for the sinner and the outcaste, the downtrodden and the disinherited, too." But, in order to be worthy of that promise, we must be obedient and devoted children of the Mother and not disobedient and disloyal children, who only make a pretence of devotion.

The *Gita* is the Universal Mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to anyone who knocks. A true votary of the *Gita* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit, who bring to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed.[2]

She is a wonderful Mother. *Gita* means 'Song'. It is used as an adjective applied to *Upanishad* which is in the feminine gender. It has been likened to the sacred cow, the giver of all desires. Hence, Mother. Well, that Immortal Mother gives all the milk we need for spiritual sustenance, if we would but approach her as babes seeking and sucking it from her. She is capable of yielding milk to her millions of babes from her exhaustless udder.

In doing the Harijan work, in the midst of calumny, misrepresentations and apparent disappointments, her lap comforts me and keeps me from falling into the Slough of Despond.[3]

Why Not Meditate on Mother Gita?

IF you read it (the *Gita*) with the idea in your mind that it is our Mother guiding us from day to day, you will not find it uninteresting. After the daily reading, you should ponder over it for a minute, and then you will perceive something new. Only a perfect man could get nothing from it. But for those who fall into error every day, the *Gita* is a saviour of which they will never get tired.[4]

To meditate on the image of living people is not to be commended. We must attribute perfection to the object of our meditation, but no living person can be perfect. The illustrations in the *Ramayana* are no good. God has no shape and no attributes. Why not meditate on Him? If that is impossible, let us meditate on *Omkar* (the syllable *Om*), or on a figure imagined by ourselves. Why not meditate on *Mother Gita*? She is compared to the Cow of Plenty (*Kamadhenu*). Let us meditate on this Cow. To meditate on the figure of living persons is likely to do harm and must, therefore, be avoided.[5]

It is improper that one should meditate over a living person who can never be perfect. If image worship is referred to in the *Gita,* the images must be those of the Incarnations of God. We do not have any real images of them. That is why I say that we may worship the Incarnations of our imagination. I will not go so far as to say that one may not meditate on, say, a picture of Ravivarma. All depends upon the mental attitude of the worshipper.[6]

Suggestions about Meditation

THERE is nothing wrong if you draw a picture by your own imagination and meditate over it. But nothing like it, if one could rest content with the meditation of *Mother Gita.* This can be done either by thinking of one's dead mother as the symbol of the *Gita* or by drawing a self-imagined mental picture. Mother cow, for instance, would serve the latter purpose. The second method is preferable, if possible. We may meditate on any *Gita* verse or even one single word in it. Every word in the *Gita* is an ornament of hers, and to think of an ornament of our beloved object is as good as thinking of it itself. But someone could devise a third mode of meditation and should be free to practise his own device. Every brain works differently from every other brain. No two persons think of the same thing in the same way. There is bound to be some difference or other between their descriptions and imaginings.

As the Sixth Chapter assures us, the least little *sadhana* (spiritual effort) is not wasted. The seeker will proceed further in his next birth, starting from it as a base. Similarly, if a person has the will but not the ability to make spiritual progress, his environment in his subsequent birth will be such as to strengthen that will. But this fact must not be made an excuse for relaxation now. If it is so made, it means that the will is only intellectual and not heart-felt. Intellectual will serves no useful purpose, as it does not persist after death. If the will is heart-felt, it must manifest itself in effort. But it is quite possible that physical weakness as well as the environment may come in its way. Even so, when the soul leaves the body, it carries its goodwill with it, which fructifies into deed in the subsequent birth when circumstances are more favourable. Thus, one who does good is sure to make steady progress.

Jnaneshvar may have meditated on Nivritti during the latter's lifetime. But we must not follow his example. One on whom we meditate must be a perfect individual. To ascribe such perfection to a living person is improper and unnecessary. Again, it is possible that Jnaneshvar meditated on Nivritti not as he actually was, but as he had imagined him to be. Such refinement is not, however, for people like ourselves. When we raise the question of meditating on a living person, there is no room for a mental image of him. If the question is answered with such an image in view, it can only throw the questioner into mental confusion.[7]

CHAPTER II

THE GITA AND THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

NOTHING elates me so much as the music of the *Gita* or the *Ramayana* by Tulsidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the *Gita* was my solace.[1]

When I hear *Gita* verses melodiously recited, I never grow weary of hearing; and the more I hear, the deeper sinks the meaning into my heart. Melodious recitations of the *Ramayana,* which I heard in my childhood, left on me an impression which years have not obliterated or weakened.[2]

I find the greatest consolation from the *Bhagavad Gita* and Tulsidas's *Ramayana.* I frankly confess that the *Quran,* the *Bible* and the other scriptures of the world, in spite of my great regard for them, do not move me as do the *Gita* of Krishna and the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas.[3]

A Key to the World Scriptures

THE *Gita* has become for me the key to the scriptures of the world. It unravels for me the deepest mysteries to be found in them. I regard them with the same reverence that I pay to the Hindu scriptures. Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, Parsis, Jews are convenient labels. But when I tear them down, I do not know which is which. We are all children of the same God. "Verily, verily, I sal unto you, not everyone that sayeth unto me 'Lord', 'Lord', shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in Heaven shall enter the Kingdom," was said, though in different words, by all the great teachers of the world.[4]

I do believe in the *Vedas,* the *Upanishads,* the *Smritis* and *Puranas.* But, to me, the *Gita* is the key to a knowledge of the *Shastras.* It enunciates the principles on which all conduct must be based. It sums up the whole of the *Shastras* and, therefore, absolves laymen from having to explore the other books. But I go a step further. The *Vedas* are not the four books known as such. They contain only fragments of the originals. Eternal Truth cannot be buried in or confined to printed books. The *Vedas* are, therefore, indefinable and unwritten. They reside in one's heart. And our *Shastras* tell us what discipline and study are necessary for opening out the heart for receiving the truth. One's experience, therefore, must be the final guide. The written word undoubtedly helps, but even that has to be interpreted and, when there are conflicting interpretations, the seeker is the final arbiter.[5]

Hinduism, as I know it, entirely satisfies my soul, fills my whole being and I find a solace in the *Bhagavad Gita* and *Upanishads* that I miss even in the *Sermon on the Mount.* Not that I do not prize the ideal presented therein, not that some of the precious teachings in the *Sermon on the Mount* have not left a deep impression upon me, but I must confess that when doubts haunt me, when disappointments stare me in the face, and when I see not one ray of light on the horizon, I turn to the *Bhagavad Gita* and find a verse to comfort me; and I immediately begin to smile in the midst of overwhelming sorrow. My life has been full of external tragedies, and if they have not left any visible and indelible effect on me' owe it to the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita.*[6]

I enjoy a peace and equanimity of spirit which has excited the envy of many Christian friends. I have got it principally through the *Gita*.[7]

The spirit of the *Sermon on the Mount* competes almost on equal terms with the *Bhagawad Gita* for the domination of my heart.[8]

I have not been able to see any difference between the *Sermon on the Mount* and the *Bhagavad Gita*. What the *Sermon* describes in a graphic manner, the *Bhagavad Gita* reduces to a scientific formula. It may not be a scientific book in the accepted sense of the term, but it has argued out the Law of Love—the Law of Abandon, as I would call it—in a scientific manner. The *Sermon on the Mount* gives the same law in wonderful language. The *New Testament* gave me comfort and boundless joy, as it came after the repulsion that parts of the *Old* had given me.* To-day, supposing I was deprived of the *Gita* and forgot all its contents but had a copy of the *Sermon*, I should derive the same joy from it as I do from the *Gita*.

There is one thing in me, and that is that I love to

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*"I began reading it (the *Bible*), but I could not possibly read through the *Old Testament*. I read the Book of Genesis, and the chapters that followed invariably sent me to sleep. But, just for the sake of being able to say that I had read it, I plodded through the other books with much difficulty and without the least interest or understanding. I disliked reading the Book of Numbers.

"But the *New Testament* produced a different impression, especially the *Sermon on the Mount* which went straight to my heart. I compared it with the *Gita*. The verses—'But I say unto you that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak too'—delighted me beyond measure and put me in mind of Shamal Bhatt's 'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal' etc. My young mind tried to unify the teaching of the *Gita*, the *Light of Asia* and the *Ssrmon on the Mount*. That renunciation was the highest form of religion appealed to me greatly."

—*My Experiments with Truth*: Part I; Chap. XX.

see the bright side of things and not the seamy side, and so I can derive comfort and inspiration from any great book of any great religion. I may not be able to reproduce a single verse from the *Gita* or the *New Testament*, a Hindu child or Christian child may be able to repeat the verses better, but those clever children cannot deprive me of the assimilation that is in me to-day of the spirit of the two books.[9]

I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulsidas's *Ramayana*. I have also derived solace from the *New Testament* and the *Quran*. I do not approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the *Bhagavad Gita*, though everything in the former may not appeal to me—everything in the *Epistles of Paul*, for instance,—not everything in Tulsidas. The *Gita* is a pure religious discourse, given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the Supreme Goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection.[10]

I have a Christian friend telling me that the *Gita* shows him how to live the *New Testament*, and that many passages in the latter which used to be dark were intelligible to him through a study of the *Gita*.[11]

I read and get all my inspiration from the *Gita*. But I also read the *Bible* and the *Quran* to enrich my own religion. I incorporate all that is good in other religions.[12]

A Poser

'A WELL-WISHER' sends these lines for my meditation :

> "The *Bible* can be read in 566 languages. In how may can the *Upanishads* and the *Gita*?"

It is usual for me to receive such posers. 'A well wisher' deserves an answer. I have great regard for the missionaries for their zeal and self-sacrifice. But I have not hesitated to point out to them that both are often misplaced. What though the *Bible* were translated in every tongue in the world ? Is a patent medicine better than the *Upanishads* for being advertised in more languages than the *Upanishads* ? An error does not become truth by reason of multiplied propagation, nor does truth become error because nobody will see it. The *Bible* was a great power when the early fathers preached it than it is to-day. 'A well-wisher' has little conception of the way truth works, if he thinks that the translation of the *Bible* in more languages than the *Upanishads* is any test of its superiority. Truth has to be lived, if it is to fructify. But if it is any satisfaction to 'a well wisher' to have my answer, I may gladly tell him that the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* have been translated into far fewer languages than the *Bible*. I have never been curious enough to know in how many languages they are translated.[13]

Spiritual matters do not admit of the ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and, secondly, because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus, the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That, to my mind, is the secret of the hold of the *Gita*, Tulsidas's *Ramayana* and such other works on the millions.[14]

CHAPTER III

MY FIRST ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE GITA

TOWARDS the end of my second year in England, I came across two Theosophists, brothers, and both unmarried. They talked to me about the *Gita*. They were reading Sir Edwin Arnold's translation—*The Song Celestial*—and they invited me to read the original with them. I felt ashamed, as I had read the Divine Poem neither in Sanskrit nor in Gujarati. I was constrained to tell them that I had not read the *Gita*, but that I would gladly read it with them, and that though my knowledge of Sanskrit was meagre, still I hoped to be able to understand the original to the extent of telling where the translation failed to bring out the meaning. I began reading the *Gita* with them. The verses in the Second Chapter

> *"If one*
> *Ponders on objects of the sense, there springs*
> *Attraction; from attraction grows desire,*
> *Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds*
> *Recklessness; then the memory—all betrayed—*
> *Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,*
> *Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone."*

made a deep impression on my mind, and they still ring in my ears.

The book struck me as one of priceless worth. The impression has ever since been growing on me, with the result that I regard it to-day as the book *par excellence* for the knowledge of Truth. It has afforded me invaluable help in my moments of gloom. I have read almost all the English translations of it, and I regard Sir Edwin Arnold's as the best. He has been faithful to the text, and yet it does not read like a translation. Though I read the *Gita* with these friends, I cannot pretend to have studied it then. It was only after some years that it became a book of daily reading.[1]

Dictionary of Daily Reference

I ALREADY had faith in the *Gita*, which had a fascination for me. Now I realized the necessity of diving deeper into it. I had one or two translations, by means of which I tried to understand the original Sanskrit. I decided also to get by heart one or two verses every day. For this purpose, I employed the time of my morning ablutions. The operation took me thirty-five minutes—fifteen minutes for the tooth-brush, and twenty for the bath. The first I used to do standing in Western fashion. So, on the wall opposite, I stuck slips of paper on which were written the *Gita* verses and referred to them now and then to help my memory. This time was found sufficient for memorizing the daily portion and recalling the verses already learnt. I remember having thus committed to memory thirteen chapters. But the memorizing of the *Gita* had to give way to other work and the creation and nurture of *Satyagraha*, which absorbed all my thinking time.

What effect this reading of the *Gita* had on my friends, only they can say; but to me the *Gita* became an infallible guide of conduct. It became my dictionary of daily reference. Just as I turned to the English dictionary for the meanings of English words that I did not understand, I turned to this dictionary of conduct for a ready solution of all my troubles and trials. Words like *aparigraha* (non-possession) and *samabhava* (equability) gripped me. How to cultivate and preserve that equability was the question. How was one to treat alike insulting, insolent and corrupt officials, co-workers of yesterday raising meaningless opposition, and men who had always been good to one? How was one to divest oneself of all possessions? Was not the body itself possession enough? Were not wife and children possessions? Was I to destroy all the cupboards of books I had? Was I to give up all I had and follow Him? Straight came the answer: I could not follow Him unless I gave up all I had.

My study of English law came to my help. Snell's discussion of the maxims of equity came to my memory. I understood more clearly, in the light of the *Gita* teaching, the implication of the word 'trustee'. My regard for jurisprudence increased, I discovered in it religion. I understood the *Gita* teaching of non-possession to mean that those who desired salvation should act like the trustee who, though having control over great possessions, regards not an iota of them as his own. It became clear to me as daylight that non-possession and equability presupposed a change of heart, a change of attitude. I then wrote to Revashankarbhai to allow the insurance policy to lapse and get whatever could be recovered, or else to regard the premiums already paid as lost, for I had become convinced that God, who created my wife and children as well as myself, would take care of them. To my brother, who had been as father to me, I wrote explaining that I had given him all that I had saved up to that moment, but that henceforth he should expect nothing from me, for future savings, if any, would be utilized for the benefit of the community.

I could not easily make my brother understand this. In stern language, he explained to me my duty towards him. I should not, he said, aspire to be wiser than our father. I must support the family as he did. I pointed out to him that I was doing exactly what our father had done. The meaning of 'family' had but to be slightly widened and the wisdom of my step would become clear.

My brother gave me up and practically stopped all communication. I was deeply distressed, but it would have been a greater distress to give up what I considered to be my duty, and I preferred the lesser. But that did not affect my devotion to him, which remained as pure and great as ever. His great love for me was at the root of his misery. He did not so much want my money as that I should be well-behaved towards the family. Near the end of his life, however, he appreciated my view-point. When almost on his death-bed, he realized that my step had been right and wrote me a most pathetic letter. He apologized to me, if indeed a father may apologize to his son.[2]

Store-House of Truths

IT is sometimes alleged against the *Gita* that it is too difficult a work for the man in the street. The criticism, I venture to submit, is ill-founded. The *Gita* enabled the late Lokamanya,* out of his encyclopaedic learning and study, to produce a monumental commentary. For him, it was a store-house of profound truths to exercise his intellect upon. But that need not scare away a lay reader.

---

*Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

If you find all the eighteen chapters too difficult to negotiate, make a careful study of the first three chapters only. They will give you in a nutshell what is propounded in greater detail and from different angles in the remaining fifteen chapters. Even these three chapters can be further epitomized in a few verses that can be selected from these chapters. Add to this the fact that at three distinct places the *Gita* goes even further and exhorts us to leave alone all 'isms' and take refuge in the Lord alone, and it will be seen how baseless is the charge that the message of the *Gita* is too subtle or complicated for lay minds to understand.[3]

The Theme of the Gita

> "YOU have said that for those who have no time to go through the whole of the *Gita* (700 verses), it is sufficient to read the Second and Third Chapters. You have also said that these two chapters can be further epitomized. If possible, you should explain why you regard the Second and Third Chapters as fundamental."

I have endeavoured to show that its (the *Gita's*) message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment.* The theme of the *Gita* is contained in the Second Chapter, and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the Third Chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The *Gita* has been called *'Gitai'* by Vinoba, who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is the real Mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties.

---

* By detachment I mean that one must not worry whether the desired result follows from your action or not, so long as your motive is pure, your means correct. Really, it means that things will come right in the end if you take care of the means and leave the rest to Him."

—*Harijan*: April 7, 1946.

I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in my distress. It is, moreover, a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard *Gita* as an abstruse book. No doubt, learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But, in my opinion, a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the *Gita*. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical translation, which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial*.[4]

CHAPTER IV

STUDENTS AND THE GITA

THE other day, in the course of a conversation, a missionary friend asked me if India was really a spiritually advanced country, why it was that he found only a few students having any knowledge of their own religion, even of the *Bhagavad Gita*. In support of the statement the friend, who is himself an educationist, told me that he had made it a point to ask the students he met, whether they had any knowledge of their religion or of the *Bhagavad Gita*. A vast majority of them were found to be innocent of any such knowledge.

I do not propose to take up at the present moment the inference, that because certain students had no knowledge of their own religion, India was not a spiritually advanced country, beyond saying that the ignorance on the part of the students of religious books did not necessarily mean absence of all religious life, or want of spirituality among the people to which the students belonged. But there is no doubt that the vast majority of students, who pass through the Government educational institutions, are devoid of any religious instruction.* The remark of

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*"I have experimented with quite a number of boys in order to understand how best to impart religious instruction, and whilst I found that book instruction was somewhat of an aid, by itself it was useless. Religious instruction, I discovered, was imparted by teachers living the religion themselves. I have found that boys imbibe more from the teachers' own lives than they do from the books that they read to them, or the lectures that they deliver to them with their lips. I have discovered, to my great joy, that boys and girls have unconsciously a faculty of penetration whereby they read the thoughts of their teachers. Woe to the teacher who teaches one thing with his lips, and carries another in his breast."
—*With Gandhiji in Ceylon; p.* 108,

the missionary had reference to the Mysore students, and I was somewhat pained to observe that even the students of Mysore had no religious instruction in the State schools. I know that there is a school of thought which believes in only secular instruction being given in public schools. I know also that in a country like India, where there are most religions of the world represented, and where there are so many denominations in the same religion, there must be a difficulty about making provision for religious instruction. But if India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held to be at least as necessary as secular instruction. It is true that knowledge of religious books is no equivalent of that religion. But if we cannot have religion, we must be satisfied with providing our boys and girls with what is next best. And whether there is such instruction given in the schools or not, grown-up students must cultivate the art of self-help about matters religious as about others. They may start their own class, just as they have their own debating, and now, spinners' clubs.

The *Gita* is, in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems, which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the *Gita* is, in my opinion, unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass, it gives a complete, reasoned, moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple. But I, nevertheless, think that there should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translations should be so prepared as to avoid technicalities, and in a manner that would make the teaching of the *Gita* intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For, I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit.* But, for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita*, because they do not know Sanskrit.[1]

Hindu Students and the Gita

THE very first earnest request that I would make to the students is, that each one of you should search within, and wherever you find that my remarks are justified, you will begin to reform and rebuild yourself. And those of you who are Hindus will endeavour to understand the very simple, beautiful, and to me soulful message of the *Gita*. The experience, and I think I can say the experience without a single exception of those who have really carried on this search after Truth, to render their hearts pure, is that it is an utterly impossible effort, unless it is accompanied by a heart-prayer to the Almighty. Whatever, therefore, you do, do not lose faith in God. I cannot reason out the thing for you; because, really speaking, it is a fact which transcends reason. But I want you to cultivate a spirit of real humility and not summarily reject the experiences of so many teachers, *Rishis* and others of the world, and not regard them as so many superstitious men.[2]

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*"The study of Sanskrit is being sadly neglected I belong to a generation which believed in the study of the ancient languages. I do not believe that such a study is a waste of time and effort. I believe it is an aid to the study of modern languages. This is truer of Sanskrit than of any other ancient languages so far as India is concerned, and every nationalist should study it because it makes a study of the provincial languages easier than otherwise. It is the language in which our forefathers thought and wrote. No Hindu boy or girl should be without a knowledge of the rudiments of Sanskrit, if he will imbibe the spirit of his religion."

—*Harijan*: March 23, 1940.

I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect. It is necessary for all to aspire after perfection, even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection; but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I, therefore, submit in all humility that even the *Vedas*, the *Quran* and the *Bible* are the imperfect word of God; and imperfect beings that we are, we are swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions. It is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fullness. And so I say to a Hindu boy that he must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up, as I say to a Mussalman or a Christian boy that he must not uproot his traditions.

And so, whilst I would welcome your learning the *Gospel* and your learning the *Quran*, I would certainly insist on all of you Hindu boys, if I had the power of insistence, learning the *Gita*. It is my belief that the impurity that we see about boys in schools, the carelessness about things that matter in life, the levity with which the student world deals with the greatest and most fundamental questions of life, is due to this uprooting of tradition from which boys have hitherto derived their sustenance.

But I must not be misunderstood. I do not hold that everything ancient is good because it is ancient. I do not advocate surrender of God-given reasoning faculty in the face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient, if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered to be an ancient tradition, the institution of childwidowhood and childmarriage may be considered to be ancient tradition, and even so many an ancient horrible belief and superstitious practice. I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power. When, therefore, I talk of respecting the ancient tradition, you now understand what I mean. And it is because I see the same God in the *Bhagavad Gita*, as I see in the *Bible* and the *Quran*, that I say to the Hindu boys that they will derive greater inspiration from the *Bhagavad Gita*, because they will be tuned to the *Gita* more than to any other book.

Equipment for Reading the Gita

I CANNOT conceive anything so fortifying as a reverent study of the *Bhagavad Gita*, and if students will remember that they are to learn it not in order to parade their Sanskrit knowledge, or even their knowledge of the *Gita*, they will know that they learn it in order to derive spiritual comfort and to solve the moral difficulties that face them. No man who engages in a reverent study of that book can help becoming a true servant of the nation and through it of humanity.

The *Gita* contains the Gospel of Work, the Gospel of *Bhakti* or Devotion, and the Gospel of *Jnana* or knowledge. Life should be a harmonious whole of these three. But the Gospel of Service is the basis of all, and what can be more necessary for those who want to serve the country than that they begin with the Chapter enunciating the Gospel of Work? But you must approach it with the five necessary equipments, *viz.*, *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), and *Asteya* (Non-stealing). Then, and then only, will you be able to reach a correct interpretation of it. And then you will read it to discover in it *Ahimsa*, and not *Himsa,* so as many now-a-days try to do. Read it with the necessary equipment and, I assure you, you will have peace of which you were never aware before.[4]

Distortion of Truth

A CORRESPONDENT has been endeavouring, with the help of the Headmaster of a High School, to introduce the teaching of the *Gita* among its boys. But at a recent meeting convened to organize *Gita* readings, a Bank Manager got up and disturbed the even tenor of the proceedings by saying that students had not the *adhikara* 'qualification' for studying the *Gita;* it was not a plaything to be placed before students. The correspondent sends me a long and argued letter about the incident, and sends in support of his contention some apt sayings from Ramakrishna Paramahamsa from which I cull the following :

> "Boys and youths should be encouraged to seek God. They are like unpecked fruits, being totally untainted by worldly desires. Once such desires have entered their minds, it is very difficult to make them tread the path to salvation.
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> "Why do I love young men so much? Because they are masters of the whole (16 annas) of their minds, which get divided and sub-divided as they grow up. One-half of the mind of a married man goes to his wife. When a child is born, it takes away one-fourth (4 annas), and the remaining one-fourth (4 annas) is scattered over parents, worldy honours, dress etc. Therefore, a young mind can easily know God. It is very difficult for old people to do so.
>
> "The parrot cannot be taught to sing if the membrane of its throat becomes hardened with age. It must be taught while it is young. Similarly, in old

age, it is difficult for the mind to be fixed on God. It can be easily done so in youth.

"If a *seer* of adulterated milk contains a *chhatak* (sixteenth part of a *seer*) of water, it can be thickened into *kshira* (condensed milk) with very little labour and consumption of fuel. But should there be three *paos* (¼ seer) of water in a *seer*, the milk canot be easily thickened and a large consumption of fuel will be required. *A young mind, being but slightly adulterated with worldly desires, can be easily turned towards God; this cannot be done with the minds of old people which are highly adulterated with such desires.*

"The tender bamboo can be easily bent, but the full-grown bamboo breaks when an attempt is made to bend it. It is easy to bend young hearts towards God, but the heart of the old escapes the hold when so drawn.

"The human mind is like a package of mustard seed. As it is very difficult to gather the seeds that escape out of a torn package and are scattered in all directions, so when the human mind runs in diverse directions and is occupied with many worldly things, it is not a very easy task to collect and concentrate it. The mind of a youth, not running in diverse directions, can be easily fixed on anything; but the mind of an old man being totally occupied with worldly things, it is very hard for him to draw it away from them and fix it on God."

I had heard of *adhikara* in connection with the *Vedas*, but I never knew that the *Gita* required the qualifications that the Bank Manager had in mind. It would have been better if he had stated the nature of the qualifications he required. The *Gita* clearly states that it is meant for all but scoffers. If Hindu students may not read the *Gita*, they may not read any religious works at all. Indeed, the original conception in Hinduism is that the student life is the life of a *Brahmachari*, who should begin it with a knowledge of religion *coupled with practice*, so that he may digest what he learns and weave religious conduct into his life. The student of old began to live his religion before he knew what it was, and this conduct was followed by due enlightenment, so that he might know the reason for the conduct prescribed for him.

Adhikara, then, there certainly was. But it was the *adhikara* of right conduct known as the five *Yamas* or cardinal restraints—*Ahimsa* (Innocence), *Satya* (Truth) *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession), and *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy). These were the rules that had to be observed by anybody who wished to study religion. He may not go to religious books for proving the necessity of these fundamentals of religion.

But to-day the word *adhikara*, like many such potent words, has suffered distortion, and a dissolute man, simply because he is called a *Brahmin*, has *adhikara* to read and expound *Shastras* to us; whereas a man, if he is labelled an untouchable because of his birth in a particular state, no matter how virtuous he may be, may not read them.

But the author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is a part, wrote his great work for the purpose of meeting this insane objection, and made it accessible to all irrespective of the so-called caste, provided, I presume, that he complied with the observances I have described. I add the qualifying expression 'I presume', for, at the time of writing, I do not recall the observance of the *Yamas* as a condition precedent to a person studying the *Mahabharata*.

Experience, however, shows that the purity of heart and the devotional frame of mind are necessary for a proper understanding of religious books.

The printing age has broken down all barriers, and scoffers read religious books with the same freedom (if not greater) that the religiously-minded have. But we are here discussing the propriety of students reading the *Gita* as part of religious instruction and devotional exercise. Here, I cannot imagine any class of persons more amenable to the restraints, and thus more fitted, than students for such instruction. Unfortunately, it is to be admitted that neither the students nor the instructors, in the majority of cases, think anything of the real *adhikara* of the five restraints.[5]

Gita in National Schools

A CORRESPONDENT asks whether *Gita* may be compulsorily taught in national schools to all boys, whether Hindus or non-Hindus. When I was travelling in Mysore, I had occasion to express my sorrow that the Hindu boys of a High School did not know the *Gita*. I am thus partial to the teaching of *Gita* not only in national schools, but in every educational institution. It should be considered a shame for a Hindu boy or girl not to know the *Gita*. But my insistence stops short at compulsion, especially so for national schools. Whilst it is true that the *Gita* is a book of universal religion, it is a claim which cannot be forced upon anyone. A Christian or a Mussalman or a Parsi may reject the claim or may advance the same claim for the *Bible*, the *Quran* or the *Avesta* as the case may be. I fear that *Gita* teaching cannot be made compulsory, even regarding all those who may choose to be classed as Hindus. Many Sikhs and Jains regard themselves as Hindus, but may object to compulsory *Gita* teaching for their boys and girls. The case will be different for sectional schools. I should hold it quite appropriate for a *Vaishnava* school, for instance, to lay down the *Gita* as part of religious instruction. Every private school has the right to prescribe its own course of instruction. But a national school has to act within well-defined limits. There is no compulsion where there is no interference with a right. No one can claim the right to enter a private school, every member of a nation has the right presumptively to enter a national school. Hence, what would be regarded in the one case as a condition of entrance, would, in the other, be regarded as compulsion. The *Gita* will never be universal by compulsion from without. It will be so, if its admirers will not seek to force it down the throats of others, and if they will illustrate its teachings in their own lives.[6]

Study of the Gita

OUR students are prone to be upset by trifles. A trivial thing like failure in an examination plunges them into the darkest despair. The *Gita* inculcates in them the duty of perseverance in the face of seeming failure. It teaches us that we have a right to actions only but not to the fruit thereof, and that success and failure are one and the same thing at bottom. It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves, body, mind and soul, to pure duty, and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of all chance desires and undisciplined impulses. As a *Satyagrahi*, I can declare that the *Gita* is ever presenting me with fresh lessons. If somebody tells me that this is my delusion, my reply to him would be that I shall hug this delusion as my richest treasure.

I would advise the students to begin their day with an early morning recitation of the *Gita*. I am a lover and devotee of Tulsidas. I adore the great spirit that gave to an aching world the all-healing *Mantra* of *Ramanama*. But I am here to-day, not to present Tulsidas to you, but to ask you to take up the study of the *Gita*, not in a carping or critical spirit, but in a devout and reverent spirit. Thus approached, she will grant you every wish. It is no joke, I admit, remembering by heart all the eighteen chapters, but it is worthwhile to make the attempt. Once you have tasted of its sweet nectar, your attachment to it will grow from day to day. The recitation of the *Gita* verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress, even in the darkness of solitary confinement. And, if with these verses on your lips, you receive the final summons and deliver up your spirit, you will attain *Brahma Nirvana*—the Final Liberation.[7]

I have always regarded the learning by heart of such books as the *Gita* a very desirable thing. So, whenever I meet anyone who knows the *Gita* by heart, he or she commands my respect. I would like, however, the reciters to realize that the mere recitation is not an end in itself. It should be an aid to the contemplation and assimilation of the meaning and the message of the *Gita*. By patience, even a parrot can be taught to recite it by heart. But he would be no wiser for the recitation. The reciter of the *Gita* should be what its author expects him to be—*Yogi* in its broad sense. It demands from its votaries balance in every thought, word and deed and a perfect correspondence between the three. He whose speech and action do not accord with his thoughts is a humbug or a hypocrite.[8]

To Women

ALL of you should learn to read the *Gita* with correct pronunciation and understand its meaning. Just as a woman is not accomplished unless she knows cooking well, so also there is no exaggeration in saying that a woman who does not know the *Gita*, is not accomplished.[9]

Q. You say that women should know how to pronounce the *Gita* even as well as they know to cook. How is this possible? It will require much time.

A. Indeed, it does take time. But what can one not achieve with perseverance? Even if one devotes a little time regularly, one can achieve one's end. It is difficult to learn to cook after you have grown up. Even then, you can learn it if you have patience. If our women cannot pronounce Sanskrit well, the fault is not theirs. It is either of their parents or of the people at their husbands' house if they are married. But what is the use of our putting the blame on others? Let us see how we can remove the defect. Of course, we should not overdo learning to pronounce Sanskrit correctly. We should carry out our other duties and, while doing so try also to improve our pronunciation.[10]

CHAPTER V

A GOSPEL OF NON-CO-OPERATION

I VENTURE to submit that *Bhagavad Gita* is a Gospel of Non-co-operation between the forces of darkness and those of light. If it is to be literally interpreted, Arjuna, representing a just cause, was enjoined to engage in bloody warfare with the unjust Kauravas.[1]

God is one, without a second. He alone is. He is indefinable. In reality, there is no God who is at war with Satan; but we have imagined that there is a war going on between God and Satan. The author of the *Mahabharata* has described the war between the opposing forces of the Pandavas and Kauravas, and has advised men to non-co-operate with the latter.[2]

I do not believe that the *Gita* teaches violence for doing good. It is pre-eminently a description of the duel that goes on in our own hearts. The divine author has used a historical incident for inculcating the lesson of doing one's duty even at the peril of one's life. It inculcates performance of duty irrespective of the consequences; for, we mortals, limited by our physical frames, are incapable of controlling actions save our own. The *Gita* distinguishes between the powers of light and darkness, and demonstrates their incompatibility.[3]

I have the courage of saying that Krishna never taught violence in the *Gita*. My interpretation of the *Gita* is, that it has based a religious teaching on a historical incident, and that it does not deal with an earthly war but it deals with the ceaselesss spiritual war going on in the human *Kurukshetra.* I can understand the *Nirdwandwa* teaching on no other hypothesis. A man who is free from the action of the pairs of opposites, is incapable, like the perfect man of the *Bible,* of injuring any living thing on earth. He kills himself so truly that there is no rebirth for him.[4]

In my opinion, the *Bhagavad Gita* is a purely religious, not historical, treatise. It has taken a historical and secular incident to build up a grand religious doctrine. It deals with the war that is eternally waging between the forces of evil and good. Ormuzd and Ahriman, Hyde and Jekyl in the human breast. We cannot do enough violence to all the evil passions that well up on that little *Kurukshetra.* Historically considered, the *Bhagavad Gita* tends to show that Arjuna having made the choice could not, yielding to false sentiment, withdraw from the battle. The author of the *Gita* never advocated war or violence. It is a sermon on non-violence. Fight, without anger and passion, can only be spiritual.[5]

It deals with the eternal duel between good and evil. And who does not, like Arjuna, often quail when the dividing line between good and evil is thin, and when the right choice is so difficult?[6]

My claim to Hinduism has been rejected by some, because I believe and advocate non-violence in its extreme form. They say that I am a Christian in disguise. I have been even seriously told that I am distorting the meaning of the *Gita,* when I ascribe to that great poem the teaching of unadulterated non-violence. Some of my Hindu friends tell me that killing is a duty enjoined by the *Gita* under certain circumstances. A very learned *Shastri* only the other day scornfully rejected my interpretation of the *Gita* and said that there was no warrant for the opinion held by some commentators that the *Gita* represented the eternal duel between forces of evil and good, and inculcated the duty of eradicating evil within us without hesitation, without tenderness.[7]

I do not agree that the *Gita* advocates and teaches violence in any part of it. See the concluding discourse at the end of Chapter Two. Although that Chapter lends itself to a violent interpretation, the concluding verses seem to me to preclude any such interpretation. The fact is that a literal interpretation of the *Gita* lands one in a sea of contradictions. The letter truly killeth, the spirit giveth life.

I ascribe to the *Gita* a totally different meaning from that ordinarily given. I do not regard it as a description of, or an exhortation to, physical warfare. And, in any case, it is God—the All-Knowing—who descends to the earth to punish the wicked.[9]

CHAPTER VI

KRISHNA OF MY CONCEPTOIN

I BELIEVE in Krishna. But my Krishna is the Lord of the Universe—the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of us all. He may destroy because He creates.[1]

I have no knowledge that the Krishna of *Mahabharata* ever lived. My Krishna has nothing to do with any historical person. I would refuse to bow my head to the Krishna who would kill because his pride is hurt, or the Krishna whom non-Hindus portray as a dissolute youth. I believe in Krishna of my imagination as a perfect incarnation, spotless in every sense of the word, the inspirer of the *Gita* and the inspirer of the lives of millions of human beings. But if it was proved to me that the *Mahabharata* is history in the same sense that modern historical books are, that every word of the *Mahabharata* is authentic and that the Krishna of the *Mahabharata* actually did some of the acts attributed to him, even at the risk of being banished from the Hindu fold, I should not hesitate to reject that Krishna as God-incarnate. But, to me, the *Mahabharata* is a profoundly religious book, largely allegorical, in no way meant to be a historical record. It is the description of the eternal duel going on within ourselves, given so vividly as to make us think, for the time being, that the deeds described therein were actually done by the human beings. Nor do I regard the *Mahabharata*, as we have it now, as a faultless copy of the original. On the contrary, I consider that it has undergone many amendations.[2]

The Mahabharata

KRISHNA failed to do nothing he wished to do, so says the author of the *Mahabharata.* He was omnipotent. It is futile to drag Krishna from his heights. If he has to be judged as a mere mortal, I fear he will fare badly and will have to take a back seat. *Mahabharata* is neither fiction, nor history commonly so-called. It is the history of the human soul in which God, as Krishna, is the chief actor. There are many things in that poem that my poor understanding cannot fathom. There are in it many things which are obvious interpolations. It is not a treasure-chest. It is a mine which needs to be explored, which needs to be dug deep and from which diamonds have to be extracted after removing much foreign matter.* Therefore, I would urge my friends to keep their feet firm on Mother Earth and not scale the Himalayan heights to which the poet took Arjuna and his other heroes. Anyway, I must respectfully refuse even to attempt the ascent. The plains of Hindustan are good enough for me.[3]

Many of us make the very serious mistake of taking literally what is accepted as scriptures, forgetting that the letter killeth and the spirit giveth life. The *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* are neither history, nor simple religious maxims. They appear to me to be wonderfully designed to illustrate the religious history of man in a variety of ways. The heroes described therein are all imperfect mortals, even alleged actions are not infallible guides for us. The *Mahabharata* sums up its teaching by declaring emphatically that Truth outweighs everything else on earth.[4]

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*"I compare it not to a treasure chest in which you find nothing but polished gems limited as to quantity and quality, but to an inexhaustible mine which the deeper one digs the more precious are the finds."

—*Young India;* Sept. 4, 1924.

All the names given in the First Chapter of the *Gita* are, in my opinion, not so much proper nouns as names of qualities. In describing the eternal warfare between the heavenly and the devilish natures, the poet has personified them as the characters in the *Mahabharata*. This does not imply a refusal to believe that an actual battle took place at Hastinapur between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. I hold that the poet took some such actual event as the thread upon which to hang his discourse. But I may be wrong.[5]

The *Mahabharata* is not to me a historical record. It is hopeless as a history. But it deals with eternal verities in an allegorical fashion. It takes up historical personages and events and transforms them into angels or devils as it suits the purpose of the poet whose theme is the eternal duel between good and evil, spirit and matter, God and Satan. It is like a mighty river which in its progress absorbs many streams, some even muddy. It is the conception of one brain. But it has undergone ravages and received accretions in process of time till it has become difficult always to say which is the original and which is apocryphal. The ending of it is magnificent. It demonstrates the utter nothingness of earthly power. The great sacrifice at the end is proved inefficacious in comparison with the sacrifice of the heart by a *Brahmin* who gave his little all, the last morsel, to a needy beggar. What is left to the virtuous Pandavas is poignant grief. The mighty Krishna dies helplessly. The numerous and powerful Yadavas, because of their corruption, die an inglorious death fighting amongst one another. Arjuna, the unconquerable, is conquered by a band of robbers, his *Gandiv* notwithstanding. The Pandavas retire, leaving the throne to an infant. All but one die on the journey to Heaven. And even Yudhishthira, the very embodiment of *dharma,* has to taste the fœtid smell of hell for the lie he permitted himself to utter under stress. The inexorable law of cause and effect is allowed without exception to run its even course. The claim put forth in its behalf, that it omits nothing that is useful or interesting and that is to be found in any other book, is well sustained by this marvellous poem.[6]

I have never looked upon the *Mahabharata* as a mere record of earthly warfare. In the garb of an epic, the poet has described the eternal warfare within the individual as well as in society, between Truth and Untruth, Violence and Non-violence, Right and Wrong. Looking at the epic even superficially, one can understand how the great Vyasa has demonstrated that, in this war, the victor was no better off than the vanquished. Out of that vast concourse of warriors, only seven remained to tell the tale. And the poet gives a true picture of the woeful state of mind also of these seven. The author has shown clearly, too, that in armed warfare, the contending parties are certain to stoop to meanness and trickery. When occasion arose, even the great Yudhishthira had to resort to untruth to save the battle.[7]

Lesson of the Mahabharata

ARJUNA'S defeat at the hands of ordinary highwaymen, and the end of the victors in Himalayan snows are intended by the author of the *Mahabharata* to show the futility of war with weapons of steel. *Bhagavan* (The Lord) has given a description of Himself in the *Gita;* that is to say, the author of the *Gita* has put this description in His mouth. But, as a matter of fact, God has no shape and never talks like man. Then, the question is: Is it proper to put such speeches in the mouth of the Lord? I answer:

yes. The Lord is omnipotent and omniscient. The speech of one who is omniscient must be truthful. It cannot, therefore, count as boasting. A man cannot similarly take a measure of his own powers; therefore, such language in his mouth would be inappropriate. But when the occasion arises, a man may say that his height is so many feet, so many inches. He then does not boast, but only tells the truth. If a man 6 feet tall says that he is 5 feet in height, that is not modesty, but sheer ignorance or hypocrisy.[8]

The *Mahabharata,* of which the *Gita* is only a tiny chapter, describes in gruesome detail a mighty slaughter of the innocents which, but for our recent experiences of our civilized war, would be considered unbelievable in actual practice. The grim fact is that the terrorists have in absolute honesty, earnestness and with cogency used the *Gita,* which some of them know by heart, in defence of their doctrine and policy. Only they have no answer to my interpretation of the *Gita,* except to say that mine is wrong and theirs is right. Time alone will show whose is right. The *Gita* is not theoretical treatise. It is a living but silent guide whose directions one has to understand by patient striving.[9]

Krishna's Advice to Arjuna

WE should not mix up the historic Krishna with the Krishna of the *Gita* who was not discussing the question of violence and non-violence. Arjuna was not averse to killing in general, but only to killing his own relatives. Therefore, Krishna suggested that in doing one's duty, one may not treat one's relations differently from other people. In the age of *Gita,* the question, whether one should or should not wage war, was not raised by any important person. Indeed, it appears to have been raised only in recent times. All Hindus in those days believed in *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), but what amounted to and what did not amount to violence was a question debated then, as it is debated now. Many things which we look upon as non-violent will, perhaps, be considered violent by future generations. For, we destroy life when we use milk or cereals as food. Therefore, it is quite possible that posterity will give up milk production and the cultivation of food-grains. Just as we consider ourselves as non-violent in spite of our consumption of milk and foodgrains, so also in the age of the *Gita* fighting was such a common thing that no one thought it was contrary to *Ahimsa*. Therefore, I do not see anything wrong in the *Gita* having used warfare as an illustration. But if we study the whole of the *Gita* and examine its descriptions of *Sthitaprajna, Brahmabhuta, Bhakta* and *Yogi*, we can reach only this conclusion that the Krishna of the *Gita* was the very incarnation of *Ahimsa*, and his exhortation to Arjuna to fight does not detract from his greatness. On the other hand, if he had given him different advice, his knowledge would have been proved inadequate, and he would not have been entitled to be called *Yogeshwara* (the Prince of *Yogis*) and *Purna Avatar* (the Perfect Incarnation).[10]

In our study of the *Gita*, we have only to consider what was the question for which an answer was sought. If, in answering a question, a teacher went beyond the scope of that question, he would be considered stupid. For, the questioner's attention is concentrated on his own question: he is not ready to listen to other things, a discussion about which he can neither understand nor appreciate. Judged by this standard, Krishna's is a perfect answer. And, when after finishing the First Chapter of the *Gita*, we enter upon the Second, we find that it teaches *Ahimsa* pure and simple. To look upon Krishna as a *Purna Avatar* (Perfect Incarnation) should not mean that we can obtain from the *Gita* direct answers to all the questions that arise from day to day, just as we find the meaning of words by looking up a dictionary. This would not be desirable even if it were possible; for, in that case, there would be nothing like progress or discovery for mankind. Human intelligence would then simply atrophy from disuse. Therefore, questions that arise in each age must be solved by the people of that age through their own effort. Our difficulties at present, such as world wars, must be met by applying the general principles derived from the *Gita* and similar books, which can be of help only to a limited extent. Real help can come only from our endeavours and struggles. In books on Indian medicine, we find various virtues attributed to a number of drugs. But their descriptions can serve us only as a guide. So long as these drugs have not been tested in actual practice, our theoretical knowledge of them not only serves no useful purpose, but is even burdensome. The same is true of the questions in life that clamour for solution.[11]

Krishna Does Not Recommend Violence

DR. KAGAWA : I am told you recite the *Bhagavad Gita* daily?

Gandhiji : Yes, we finish the entire *Gita* reading once every week.

Dr. Kagawa : But, at the end of the *Gita*, Krishna recommends violence.

Gandhiji : I do not think so. I am also fighting. I should not be fighting effectively, if I were fighting violently. The message of the *Gita* is to be found in the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind, of mental equipoise. In 19 verses at the close of the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, Krishna explains how this state can be achieved. It can be achieved, he tells us, after killing all your passions. It is not possible to kill your brother after having killed all your passions. I should like to see that man dealing death who has no passions, who is indifferent to pleasure and pain, who is undisturbed by the storms that trouble mortal man. The whole thing is described in language of beauty that is unsurpassed. These verses show that the fight Krishna speaks of is a spiritual fight.

Dr. Kagawa : But there was actual fighting then, and your interpretation is your own peculiar interpretation.

Gandhiji : It may be mine, but *as mine* it has no value.

Dr. Kagawa : To the common mind, it sounds as though it was actual fighting.

Gandhiji : You must read the whole thing dispassionately in its true context. After the first mention of fighting, there is no mention of fighting at all. The rest is a spiritual discourse.

Dr. Kagawa : Has anybody interpreted it like you?

Gandhiji : Yes. The fight is there, but the fight as it is going on within. The Pandavas and Kauravas are the forces of good and evil within. The war is the war between Jekyll and Hyde, God and Satan going on in the human breast. The internal evidence in support of this interpretation is there in the work itself and in the *Mahabharata* of which the *Gita* is a minute part. It is not a history of war between two families, but the history of man – the history of the spiritual struggle of man. I have sound reasons for my interpretation.

Dr. Kagawa : That is why I say it is *your* interpretation.

Gandhiji : But that is nothing. The question is whether it is a reasonable interpretation, whether it carries conviction. If it does, it does not matter whether it is mine or X, Y, Z's. If it does not, it has no value even if it is mine.

Dr. Kagawa : To my mind, Arjuna's ideas are wonderful. Krishna has found some excuse for him, and it was natural and necessary before Christianity.

Gandhiji: This interpretation is even historically wrong. For, Buddha existed long before Christian era, and he preached the doctrine of non-violence.

Dr. Kagawa : But Arjuna's views seem to me to be superior to Krishna's.

Gandhiji: Then, according to you, the disciple was greater than the master.

Dr. Kagawa : But I agree with what you say, with your teaching of non-violence. I shall read the *Gita* again bearing your interpretation in mind.[12]

CHAPTER VII

MESSAGE OF THE GITA

I

JUST as, acted upon by the affection of co-workers like Swami Anand and others, I wrote *My Experiments With Truth*, so has it been regarding my rendering of the *Gita*. "We shall be able to appreciate your meaning of the message of the *Gita*, only when we are able to study a translation of the whole text by yourself, with the addition of such notes as you may deem necessary. I do not think it is just on your part to deduce *Ahimsa* etc., from stray verses," thus spoke Swami Anand to me during the Non-co-operation days. I felt the force of his remarks. I, therefore, told him that I would adopt his suggestion when I got the time. Shortly afterwards, I was imprisoned. During my incarceration, I was able to study the *Gita* more fully. I went reverently through the Gujarati translation of the Lokmanya's great work. He had kindly presented me with the Marathi original and the translations in Gujarati and Hindi, and had asked me, if I could not tackle the original, at least to go through the Gujarati translation. I had not been able to follow the advice outside the prison walls. But when I was imprisoned, I read the Gujarati translation. This reading whetted my appetite for more and I glanced through several works on the *Gita*.

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* began in 1888-89 with the verse translation by Sir Edwin Arnold known as

The Song Celestial. On reading it, I felt a keen desire to read a Gujarati translation. And I read as many translations as I could lay hold of. But all such reading can give me no passport for presenting my own translation. Then again, my knowledge of Sanskrit is limited; my knowledge of Gujarati, too, is in no way scholarly. How could I then dare present the public with my translation?

It has been my endeavour, as also that of some companions, to reduce to practice the teaching of the *Gita* as I have understood it. The *Gita* has become for us a spiritual reference book. I am aware that we ever fail to act in perfect accord with the teaching. The failure is not due to want of effort, but is in spite of it. Even through the failures, we seem to see rays of hope. The accompanying rendering contains the meaning of the *Gita* message which this little band is trying to enforce in its daily conduct.

Again, this rendering is designed for women, the commercial class, the so-called *Shudras* and the like, who have little or no literary equipment, who have neither the time nor the desire to read the *Gita* in the original, and yet who stand in need of its support. In spite of my Gujarati being unscholarly, I must own to having the desire to leave to the Gujaratis, through the mother tongue, whatever knowledge I may possess. I do indeed wish, that at a time when literary output of a questionable character is pouring in upon the Gujaratis, they should have before them a rendering, that the majority can understand, of a book that is regarded as unrivalled for its spiritual merit, and so withstand the overwhelming flood of unclean literature.

This desire does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings. They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the *Gita* in their own lives. At the back of my reading, there is a claim of an endeavour to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of 40 years. For this reason, I do indeed harbour the wish that all Gujarati men or women, wishing to shape their conduct according to their faith, should digest and derive strength from the translation here presented.[1]

II

Now, about the message of the *Gita*.

Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the *Gita*, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the *Gita*. A study of the *Mahabharata* gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the *Mahabharata* as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors, superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyasa made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the *Mahabharata* has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

The author of the *Mahabharata* has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary, he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

In this great work, the *Gita* is the crown. Its Second Chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the *Gita*, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

Krishna of the *Gita* is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is, in reality, an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to truth. There is an Urdu saying which means: "Adam is not God, but he is a spark of the Divine." And, therefore, he, who is the most religiously behaved, has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought, that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.

This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the *Gita*, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the *Gita* appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to attain self-realization. That, which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the *Gita* even at the risk of repetition.

That matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of action.

This is the centre round which the *Gita* is woven. This renunciation is the central Sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words, how can one be free from action, *i.e.*, from the taint of sin? The *Gita* has answered the question in decisive language: "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, *i.e.*, by surrendering oneself to Him, body and soul."

But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the *Vedas* from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the *Gita* has insisted on devotion accompanying it. and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the *Gita*: "Have devotion, and knowledge will follow."

This devotion is not mere lip-worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence, the *Gita's* assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

Thus, the devotion required by the *Gita* is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the *Gita* has the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who is jealous of none; who is a fount of mercy; who is without egotism; who is selfless; who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery; who is ever forgiving; who is always contented; whose resolutions are firm; who has dedicated mind and soul to God; who causes no dread; who is not afraid of others; who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear; who is pure; who is versed in action and yet remains unaffected by it; who renounces all fruit, good or bad; who treats friend and foe alike; who is untouched by respect or disrespect; who is not puffed up by praise; who does not go under when people speak ill of him; who loves silence and solitude; who has a disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words, if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the *Gita* is perfect peace.

But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions, a mere learned man will pass as a *Pandit*. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota*. Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting of a *lota*.

Or, take *Bhakti*. The popular notion of *Bhakti* is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads etc. might be interrupted. This *Bhakta*, therefore, leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

But the *Gita* says: 'No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?'

While, on the one hand, it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other hand, it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is to be included in the term action. Then, how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting? The manner in which the *Gita* has solved the problem is, to my knowledge, unique. The *Gita* says: 'Do your allotted work, but renounce its fruit—be detached and work—have no desire for reward and work.'

This is the unmistakable teaching of the *Gita*. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to the result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The *Gita* reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces, reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the *Gita* is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result, often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things; he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says good-bye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he, therefore, resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.

From the bitter experiences of desire for fruit, the author of the *Gita* discovered the path of renunciation of the fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religion in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many worldly-wise people say. In my opinion, the author of the *Gita* has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits. On the contrary, he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the *Gita* teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice, cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the *Gita,* all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation, murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and, therefore, taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

Thinking along these lines, I have felt that, in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the *Gita,* one is bound to follow Truth and *Ahimsa.* When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or *himsa.* Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the *Gita* was not written to establish *Ahimsa.* It was an accepted and primary duty even before the *Gita* age. The *Gita* had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the Second Chapter.

But if the *Gita* believed in *Ahimsa* or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a war-like illustration? When the *Gita* was written, although people believed in *Ahimsa,* wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and *Ahimsa.*

In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the *Gita* as to his limitations of *Ahimsa* and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this, perhaps, lies the greatness of the poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the *Gita.* The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible, that in the age prior to that of the *Gita,* offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the *Gita* sense. In the *Gita,* continuous concentration on God is the king of sacrifices. The Third Chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body-labour for service. The Third and the Fourth Chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice, but never animal sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word *Sannyasa* undergone, in the *Gita,* a transformation. The *Sannyasa* of the *Gita* will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The *Sannyasa* of the *Gita* is all work and yet no work.* Thus, the author of the *Gita,* by extending meanings of words, has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the *Gita* it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the *Gita* in my own life, I, in all humility, feel that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of *Ahimsa* in every shape and form.

The *Gita* is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age, the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its

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**Sannyasa* in the *Gita* is renunciation of actions inspired by desire (*Kamya*).

—*The Diary of Mahadev Desai;* p. 113.

central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes, so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

Nor is the *Gita* a collection of Do's and Don'ts. What is lawful for one, may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time or in one place, may not be so at another time and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

The *Gita* has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore, the *Gita* is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say: "Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand, those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will, by the fact of this service, assuredly reach Me. And those who, being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."[2]

CHAPTER VIII

TEACHING OF THE GITA

A DISPASSIONATE reading of the *Bhagavad Gita* has revealed to me a meaning wholly contrary to the one given to it by the *Statesman* writer.* He has forgotten that Arjuna was no conscientious objector in the sense the Western war-resisters are. Arjuna believed in war. He had fought the Kaurava hosts many times before. But he was unnerved when the two armies were drawn up in battle array, and when he suddenly realized that he had to fight his nearest kinsmen and revered teachers. It was not love of man or the hatred of war that had actuated the questioner. Krishna could give no other answer than he did. The immortal author of the *Mahabharata*, of which the *Gita* is one – no doubt the brightest – of the many gems contained in that literary mine, has shown to the world the futility of war by giving the victors an empty glory, leaving but seven victors alive out of millions said to have been engaged in the fight in which unnamable atrocities were used on either side.

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*The reference is to the following passage in the *Statesman:*

"Indeed, the true but difficult teaching of Christianity seems to be that society must not fight its enemies but love them.

"Such, too—will Mr. Gandhi please note—is the clear teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita,* where Krishna tells Arjuna that victory also goes to him who fights with complete fearlessness and is utterly devoid of hatred. Indeed, on the highest plane, the argument between the conscientious objector and the knightly warrior is for ever settled in the Second Book of that great classic. We have little space to quote, and the whole poem deserves to be read not once but many times."

—*Harijan:* Sept. 5, 1936

But the *Mahabharata* has a better message even than the demonstration of war as a delusion and a folly. It is the spiritual history of man considered as an immortal being, and has used with a magnifying lens a historical episode considered in his times of moment for the tiny world round him, but in terms of present day values of no significance. In those days, the globe had not shrunk to a pinhead, as it has to-day, on which the slightest movement on one spot affects the whole. The *Mahabharata* depicts for all time the eternal struggle that goes on daily between the forces of good and evil in the human breast and in which, though good is ever victorious, evil does put up a brave show and baffles even the keenest conscience. It shows also the only way to right action.

Not a Treatise on Non-violence

A FRIEND writes :

> "I hold the view that, independently of the context of the *Gita* and the preliminary conversation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna, Hinduism does not stand decisively for non-violence in regard to organized invasion. It would be straining too much to interpret all our best scriptures in this way. Hinduism no doubt holds the spirit of compassion and love as the very highest duty for man. But it does not preach what you or the pacifists preach, and it is no good straining everything into an allegory for this object."

I have admitted in my introduction to the *Gita,** known as *Anasakti Yoga,* that it is not a treatise on non-violence, nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism, as it is practised to-day, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the *Gita* and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the *Quran* or the *Bible*. Its scriptures are also evolving and suffering addition. The *Gita* itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to *Karma*, *Sannyasa*, *Yajna*, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the *Gita* has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the *Gita* put these implications in a concrete shape.

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*Here given on p. 41,

I have endeavoured, in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism as interpreted in the *Gita*, to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time, they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the *Gita* is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows.

That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of Darkness and of Light. Anyway, I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the *Gita* to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions are an outcome of study of the *Gita*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Upanishads*, *etc.*[2]

Central Teaching of the Gita

Q. Is central teaching of the *Gita* selfless action or non-violence?

A. I have no doubt that it is *Anasakti*—selfless action. Indeed, I have called my little translation of the *Gita* *Anasakti Yoga*. And *Anasakti* transcends *Ahimsa*. He who would be *Anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. *Ahimsa* is, therefore, a necessary preliminary, it is included in *Anasakti*, it does not go beyond it.

Q. Then, does the *Gita* teach *Himsa* and *Ahimsa* both?

A. I do not read that meaning in the *Gita*. It is quite likely that the author did not write it to inculcate *Ahimsa*, but as a commentator draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text, even so I interpret the *Gita* to mean that, if its central theme is *Anasakti*, it also teaches Ahimsa. Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise *Ahimsa*. In the life beyond, there is no *Himsa* or *Ahimsa*.

Q. But Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of *Ahimsa*. For, Arjuna utters this pacifist resolve:

> *"Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,*
> *To face them weaponless, and bare my breast*

To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow."

And Lord Krishna teaches him to answer blow with blow.

A. There I join issue with you. Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday,' says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the slightest compunction. Even to-day you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your own kith and kin.' The question before him was not of non-violence, but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest.[3]

Arjuna was the Commander-in-Chief of the Pandava forces. He became suddenly paralyzed when he contemplated the awful scene before him. As a general, he knew exacly what he had to do. He knew that he had to war against his cousins. His paralysis was due to momentary weakness. He could not have given up the task before him without creating the utmost confusion and disorder, and bringing disgrace on himself and innumerable friends and followers. He was bound to engage himself and his followers in the terrible slaughter for which he had trained himself and them. It is profitless to conjecture what would have happened if non-violence in thought, word and deed had suddenly really possessed him.[4]

An Interesting Dialogue

GANDHIJI: I have had accounts of you which are far from complimentary.

Bhansali : I have never in my life, even when I was an active revolutionary, countenanced violence. Let anybody prove that I advised anyone to strike police or Government officials down. In fact, I used to denounce all such acts and attempts.

Gandhiji : Did you?

Bhansali : Yes.

Gandhiji : Do you know Baba Ramchandra?

Bhansali : Don't I know him?

Gandhiji : You do. Then, do you know that Baba Ramchandra would not ask anyone to kill another? But he believed that to pour boiling water down a man's throat was not violence. You may have preached non-violence of that kind.

Bhansali : No, but I have explained to the people the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita.* I have told them that Lord Krishna Himself has said that neither does the slayer slay, nor is he whom he slays slain.

Gandhiji : Oh! That's all you have said!

Bhansali : But does not Lord Krishna say it?

Gandhiji : That does not mean that you or I may say it. If I kill a man, I should have the gallows. My saying 'I have not killed' won't save me.

Bhansali : But if you want us to forget the teaching of the *Gita,* do tell us so. We will then not take the name of the *Gita* and follow a different precept.

Gandhiji : No, there is *no* different precept to follow. You have to re-learn your *Gita.* You have misread it all these years.[5]

CHAPTER IX

MEANING OF THE GITA

A FRIEND puts forward the following poser :

"The controversy about the teaching of the *Gita* —whether it is *Himsa* (Violence) or *Ahimsa* (Non-violence) will, it seems, go on for a long time. It is one thing what meaning we read in the *Gita,* or rather we want to read in the *Gita;* it is another what meaning is furnished by an unbiased reading of it. The question, therefore, does not present much difficulty to one who implicitly accepts *Ahimsa* as the eternal principle of life. He will say that the *Gita* is acceptable to him only if it teaches *Ahimsa.* A grand book like the *Gita* could, for him, inculcate nothing grander than the eternal religious principle of *Ahimsa.* If it did not, it would cease to be his unerring guide. It would still be worthy of his high regard, but not an infallible authority.

"In the First Chapter, we find Arjuna laying down his weapons, under the influence of *Ahimsa,* and ready to die at the hands of the Kauravas. He conjures up a vision of the disaster and the sin involved in *Himsa.* He is overcome with ennui and, in fear and trembling, exclaims:

'Oh what a mighty sin we are up to!'

"Shri Krishna catches him in that mood and tells him:

'Enough of this high philosophy; no one kills or is killed. The soul is immortal and the body must

> *perish. Fight then the fight that has come to thee as a matter of duty. Victory or defeat is no concern of thine. Acquit thyself of thy task.'*

"In the Eleventh Chapter, the Lord presents a panoramic vision of the Universe and says:

> *'I am Kala, the Destroyer of the worlds, the Ancient of Days; I am here engaged in my task of destruction of the worlds. Kill thou those already killed by me. Give not thyself up to grief."*

"*Himsa* and *Ahimsa* are equal before God. But, for man, what is God's message? Is it this: 'Fight; for thou art sure to foil thy enemies in the field'? If the *Gita* teaches *Ahimsa*, the First and the Eleventh Chapters are not consistent with the rest, at any rate do not support the *Ahimsa* theory. I wish you could find time to resolve my doubt.

The question put is eternal, and every one who has studied the *Gita* must needs find out his own solution. And although I am going to offer mine, I know that ultimately one is guided not by the intellect but by the heart. The heart accepts a conclusion for which the intellect subsequently finds the reasoning. Argument follows conviction. Man often finds reason in support of whatever he does or wants to do.

I shall, therefore, appreciate the position of those who are unable to accept my interpretation of the *Gita*. All I need do is to indicate how I reached my meaning, and what canons of interpretation I have followed in arriving at it. Mine is but to fight for my meaning, no matter whether I win or lose.

My first acquaintance with the *Gita* was in 1889, when I was almost twenty. I had not then much of an inkling of the principle of *Ahimsa*. One of the lines* of the Gujarati poet, Shamal Bhatt, had taught me the principle of winning even the enemy with love, and that teaching had gone deep into me. But I had not deduced the eternal principle of Non-violence from it. It did not, for instance, cover all animal life. I had before this tasted meat whilst in India. I thought it a duty to kill venomous reptiles like the snake. It is my conviction to-day that even venomous creatures may not be killed by a believer in *Ahimsa*. I believed in those days in preparing ourselves for a fight with the English. I often repeated a Gujarati poet's famous doggerel: 'What wonder if Britain rules', etc. My meat-eating was as a first step to qualify myself for the fight with the English. Such was my position before I proceeded to England, and there I escaped meat-eating etc., because of my determination to follow unto death the promises I had given to my mother. My love for Truth has saved me from many a pitfall.

Now, whilst in England, my contact with two English friends made me read the *Gita*. I say 'made me read,' because it was not of my own desire that I read it. But when these two friends asked me to read the *Gita* with them, I was ashamed of my ignorance. The knowledge of my total ignorance of my scriptures pained me. Pride, I think, was at the bottom of this feeling. My knowledge of Sanskrit was not enough to enable me to understand

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*"Here are those (for me) wonderful lines:
'For a bowl of water, give a goodly meal;
For a kindly greeting, bow thou down with zeal;
For a simple penny, pay thou down with gold;
If thy life be rescued, life do not withhold;
Thus the words and actions of the wise regard;
Every little service tenfold they reward.
But the truly noble know all men as one;
And return with gladness good for evil done!'"
—*My Experiments with Truth;* Part J, Chap, X.

all the verses of the *Gita* unaided. The friends, of course, were quite innocent of Sanskrit. They placed before me Sir Edwin Arnold's magnificent rendering of the *Gita*. I devoured the contents from cover to cover and was entranced by it. The last nineteen verses of the Second Chapter have since been inscribed on the tablet of my heart. They contain for me all knowledge. The truths they teach me are the 'eternal verities'. There is reasoning in them, but they represent realized knowledge.

I have since read many translations and many commentaries, have argued and reasoned to my heart's content, but the impression that the first reading gave me has never been effaced. Those verses are the key to the interpretation of the *Gita*. I would even advise rejection of the verses that may seem to be in conflict with them. But a humble student need reject nothing. He will simply say: 'It is the limitation of my own intellect that I cannot resolve this inconsistency. I might be able to do so in the time to come.' That is how he will plead with himself and with others.

A prayerful study and experience are essential for a correct interpretation of the scriptures. The injunction that a *Shudra* may not study the scriptures is not entirely without meaning. A *Shudra* means a spiritually uncultured, ignorant man. He is more likely than not to misinterpret the *Vedas* and other scriptures. Every one cannot solve an algebraical equation. Some preliminary study is a *sine qua non*. How ill would the grand truth 'I am *Brahman*' lie in the mouth of a man steeped in sin! To what ignoble purposes would he turn it! What a distortion it would suffer at his hands!

A man, therefore, who would interpret the scriptures must have the spiritual discipline. He must practise the

Yamas and *Niyamas*—the eternal guides of conduct. A superficial practice thereof is useless. The *Shastras* have enjoined the necessity of a *Guru*. But a *Guru* being rare in these days, a study of modern books inculcating *Bhakti* has been suggested by the sages. Those who are lacking in *Bhakti*, lacking in faith, are ill qualified to interpret the scriptures. The learned may draw an elaborately learned interpretation out of them, but that will not be the true interpretation. Only the experienced will arrive at the true interpretation of the scriptures.

But even for the inexperienced, there are certain canons. That interpretation is not true which conflicts with Truth. To one who doubts even Truth, the scriptures have no meaning. No one can contend with him. There is danger for the man who has failed to find *Ahimsa* in the scriptures, but he is not doomed. Truth—*Sat*—is positive; Non-violence is negative. Truth stands for the fact, the highest religion. Truth is self-evident; Non-violence is its maturest fruit. It is contained in Truth, but, as it is not self-evident, a man may seek to interpret the *Shastras* without accepting it. But his acceptance of Truth is sure to lead him to the acceptance of Non-violence.

Renunciation of the flesh is essential for realizing Truth. The sage who realized Truth found Non-violence out of the violence raging all about him and said: 'Violence is unreal, Non-violence is real.' Realization of Truth is impossible without Non-violence. *Brahmacharya* (celibacy), *Asteya* (non-stealing) *Aparigraha* (non-possession) are means to achieve *Ahimsa*. *Ahimsa* is the soul of Truth. Man is mere animal without it. A seeker after Truth will realize all this in his search for Truth, and he will then have no difficulty in the interpretation of the *Shastras*.

Another canon of interpretation is to scan not the letter, but to examine the spirit. Tulsidas' *Ramayana* is a noble book because it is informed with the spirit of purity, pity and piety. There is a verse in it which brackets drums, *Shudras,* fools and women together as fit to be beaten. A man who cites that verse to beat his wife is doomed to perdition. Rama did not only not beat his wife, but never even sought to displease her. Tulsidas simply inserted in his poem a proverb current in his days, little dreaming that there would be brutes justifying beating of their wives on the authority of the verse. But assuming that Tulsidas himself followed a custom which was prevalent in his days and beat his wife, what then? The beating was still wrong. But the *Ramayana* was not written to justify beating of their wives by their husbands. It was written to depict Rama, the perfect man, and Sita the ideal wife, and Bharat the ideal of a devoted brother. Any justification incidentlly met with therein of vicious customs should, therefore, be rejected. Tulsidas did not write his priceless epic to teach geography, and any wrong geography that we happen to come across in *Ramayana* should be summarily rejected.

Let us examine the *Gita* in the light of these observations. Self-realization and its means is the theme of the *Gita,* the fight between two armies being but the occasion to expound the theme. You might, if you like, say that the poet himself was not against war or violence and hence he did not hesitate to press the occasion of a war into service. But a reading of the *Mahabharata* has given me an altogether different impression. The poet Vyasa has demonstrated the futility of war by means of that epic of wonderful beauty. What, he asks, if the Kauravas were vanquished? And what if the Pandavas won? How many were left of the victors and what was their lot? What an end Mother Kunti came to? And where are the Yadavas to-day?

Where the description of the fight and justification of violence are not the subject-matter of the epic, it is quite wrong to emphasize those aspects. And if it is difficult to reconcile certain verses with the teaching of Non-violence, it is far more difficult to set the whole of the *Gita* in the framework of violence.

The poet, when he writes, is not conscious of all the interpretation his composition is capable of. The beauty of poetry is that the creation transcends the poet. The Truth that he reaches in the highest flights of his fancy is often not to be met with in his life. The life story of many a poet thus belies his poetry. That the central teaching of the *Gita* is not *Himsa* but *Ahimsa*, is amply demonstrated by the subject begun in the Second Chapter and summarized in the concluding Eighteenth Chapter. The treatment in the other chapters also supports the position. *Himsa* is impossible without anger, without attachment, without hatred, and the *Gita* strives to carry us to the state beyond *Sattva, Rajas* and *Tamas,* a state that excludes anger, hatred, etc. But I can even now picture to my mind Arjuna's eyes red with anger every time he draws the bow to the end of his ear.

It was not in a spirit of *Ahimsa* that Arjuna refused to go to battle. He had fought many a battle before. Only this time he was overcome with false pity. He fought shy of killing his own kith and kin. Arjuna never discussed the problem of killing as such. He did not say he would kill no one, even if he regarded him as wicked. Sri Krishna knows everyone's innermost thoughts and he saw through the temporary infatuation of Arjuna. He, therefore, told him: 'Thou hast already done the killing.

Thou canst not all at once argue thyself into Non-violence. Finish what thou hast already begun. If a passenger going in a Scotch Express gets suddenly sick of travelling and jumps out of it, he is guilty of suicide. He has not learnt the futility of travelling or travelling by a railway train. Similar was the case with Arjuna. Non-violent Krishna could give Arjuna no other advice. But to say that the *Gita* teaches violence or justifies war, because advice to kill was given on a particular occasion, is as wrong as to say that *Himsa* is the Law of Life, because a certain amount of it is inevitable in daily life. To one who reads the spirit of the *Gita*, it teaches the secret of Non-violence, the secret of realizing the Self through the physical body.

And who are Dhritarashtra and Yudhishthira and Arjuna? Who is Krishna? Were they all historical characters? And does the *Gita* describe them as such? Is it true that Arjuna suddenly stops in the midst of the fight and puts the question to Krishna, and Krishna repeats the whole of the *Gita* before him? And which is that *Gita*—the *Gita* that Arjuna forgot after having exclaimed that his infatuation was gone and which he requested Krishna to sing again, but which he could not, and which, therefore, he gave in the form of *Anugita*?

I regard Duryodhana and his party as the baser impulses in man, and Arjuna and his party as the higher impulses. The field of battle is our own body. An eternal battle is going on between the two camps and the poet-seer has vividly described it. Krishna is the Dweller within, ever whispering in a pure heart. Like the watch, the heart needs the winding of purity or the Dweller ceases to speak.

Not that actual physical battle is out of the question. To those who are innocent of Non-violence, the *Gita* does not teach a lesson of despair. He who fears, who saves his skin, who yields to his passions, must fight the physical battle whether he will or not; but that is not his *Dharma*. *Dharma* is one and one only. *Ahimsa* means *Moksha,* and *Moksha* is the realization of Truth. There is no room here for cowardice. *Himsa* will go on eternally in this strange world. The *Gita* shows the way out of it. But it also shows that escape out of cowardice and despair is not the way. Better far than cowardice is killing and being killed in battle.

If the meaning of the verses quoted by the correspondent is not still clear, I must confess my inability to make it so. Is it agreed that the Almighty God is the Creator, Protector and Destroyer and ought to be such? And if He creates, He has undoubtedly the right to destroy. And yet He does not destroy because He does not create. His law is that whatever is born must die, and in that lies His mercy. His laws are immutable. Where should we all be if He changed them capriciously?[1]

CHAPTER X

STEADFAST MAN OF THE GITA

ANSWERING the description of a steadfast man of the *Gita,* such are the lines according to Sir Edwin Arnold's rendering :

ARJUNA:

What is his mark who hath steadfast heart,
Confirmed in holy meditation? How
Know we his speech, Keshava? Sits he, moves he
Like other men?

KRISHNA:

When one, O Pritha's Son!
Abandoning desires which shake the mind
Finds in his soul full comfort for his soul,
He hath attained the Yoga—that man is such!
In sorrows not dejected, and in joys
Not overjoyed; dwelling outside the stress
Of passion, fear, and anger, fixed in calms
Of lofty contemplation;—such an one
Is Muni, *is the Sage, the true Recluse!*
He, who to none and nowhere overbound
By ties of flesh, takes evil things and good
Neither desponding nor exulting, such
Bears wisdom's plainest mark! He who shall draw
As the wise tortoise draws its four feet safe
Under its shield, his five frail senses back
Under the spirit's buckler from the world
Which else assails them, such an one, my Prince!
Hath wisdom's mark! Things that solicit sense

Hold off from the self-governed; nay, it comes,
The appetites of him who lives beyond
Depart,—aroused no more. Yet may it chance,
O Son of Kunti! that a governed mind
Shall some time feel the sense-storms sweep, and wrest
Strong self-control by the roots. Let him regain
His kingdom! let him conquer this, and sit
On Me intent. That man alone is wise
Who keeps the mastery of himself! If one
Ponders on subjects of the sense, there springs
Attraction; from attraction grows desire,
Desire flames to fierce passion, passion breeds
Recklessness; then the memory—all betrayed—
Lets noble purpose go, and saps the mind,
Till purpose, mind, and man are all undone.
But, if one deals with objects of the sense
Not loving and not hating, making them
Serve his free soul, which rests serenely in Lord,
Lo! such a man comes to tranquillity;
And out of that tranquillity shall rise
The end and healing of his earthly pains,
Since the will governed sets the soul at peace.
The soul of the ungoverned is not his,
Not hath he knowledge of himself; which lacked,
How grows serenity? and, wanting that,
Whence shall he hope for happiness?
The mind
That gives itself to follow shows of sense
Seeth its helm of wisdom rent away,
And, like a ship in waves of whirlwind, drives
To wreck and death. Only with him, great Prince!
Whose senses are not swayed by things of sense—

Only with him who holds his mastery,
Show wisdom perfect. What is midnight-gloom
To unenlightened souls shines wakeful day
To his clear gaze; what seems as wakeful day
Is known for night, thick night of ignorance
To his true-seeing eyes. Such is the Saint!
And like the ocean, day by day receiving
Floods from all lands, which never overflows;
Its boundary-line not leaping, and not leaving,
Fed by the rivers, but unswelled by those;
So is the perfect one, to his soul's ocean
The world of sense pours streams of witchery,
They leave him as they find, without commotion,
Taking their tribute, but remaining sea.
Yea; whose, shaking off the yoke of flesh
Lives lord, not servant, of his lusts; set free
From pride, from passion, from the sin of "Self",
Toucheth tranquility! O Pritha's Son!
That is the state of Brahma! *There rests no dread*
When that last step is reached! Live where he will,
Die when he may, such passeth from all plaining,
To blest Nirvana, *with the Gods, attaining."*

I confess that, in spite of my trying to reach the state, I am far away from the condition of equipoise.[1]

The Ideal of the Sthitaprajna

THE ideal of the *Sthitaprajna* (man whose understanding is secure), described in the Second Chapter of the *Gita*, is always before me and I am ceaseless in my efforts to reach that ideal. Whatever others might say of me, I know I am yet far from it. When one really reaches such a state, his very thought becomes charged with a power which transforms those around him.* But where is that power in me now? I can only say that I am a common mortal, made of the same clay of which others are made, only ceaselessly striving to attain the lofty ideal which the *Gita* holds before all mankind [2]

If we accept that ideal of a *Sthitaprajna* (स्थितिप्रज्ञ) *i.e.*, "the man of steady wisdom", *i.e.*, a *Satyagrahi*, we would not regard anybody as our enemy, we must shed all enmity and ill-will. That ideal is not meant for the select few—the saint or the seer only; it is meant for all. I have described myself as a scavenger having become one, not only in name but in fact, while I was in Phoenix. It was there that I took up the bucket and the broom, impelled by the inner urge to identify myself with the lowest of the low. As a humble fellow-toiler, then, let me bear witness that anyone, even a simple-minded villager who wants to and tries, can attain the state of mental equipoise described in the *Gita* verses. We all lose our sanity at times, though we may not care to admit it or be even aware of it. A man with a steady mind will never lose patience, even with a child, or indulge in anger or abuse.† Religion, as taught in the *Gita*, is a thing to be practised in this life. It is not a means for attaining merit in the next, irrespective of what you may do here. That would be a negation of religion.[3]

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*"There is a stage in life when a man does not need even to proclaim his thoughts, much less to show them by outward action. Mere thoughts act. They attain that power. Then, it can be said of him that his seeming inaction constitutes his action. I must confess that I am far from that state. All I can say is that my striving is in that direction."

—*Harijan :* October 26, 1947.

†"We will have to imbibe the virtue of control on our senses. This, in my view, is the essence of the teaching of the *Gita*. I think that the chief merit of the *Gita* is that certain basic truths are explained in the attractive form of a dialogue. Human beings must restrain their senses if they do not want to go mad."

—*Press Report :* April 4, 1946.

The lesson of the *Bhagavad Gita* is meant not for those who have forsaken the world, but for every householder, irrespective of his birth and state. Everybody's duty should be to attain the state described therein, and this can only be done if life is built on the rock of fearlessness.[4]

Characteristics of a Sthitaprajna

WE must, in some measure, develop in us the qualities of a *Sthitaprajna* or the man of steady wisdom.

That ideal is not meant for *Jnanis* only, it is for all, even ordinary lay people. Lord Krishna himself is depicted in the *Mahabharata* as a charioteer actually driving a team of white horses, while his pupil Arjuna, to whom the *Gita* discourses are addressed, is pictured as being plebeian in his mental make-up and outlook.

What, then, are the characteristics of a *Sthitaprajna*? He is one who withdraws his senses from the objects of the senses behind the shield of the spirit, as a tortoise does its limbs under its shell.

A man whose wisdom is not steady is liable to be betrayed into anger, evil thoughts or abuse. On the contrary, the man with the steady wisdom will remain equally unaffected by adulation or abuse. He will realize that abuse fouls only the tongue that utters it, never the person against whom it is hurled. A man of steady wisdom will, therefore, never wish ill to anyone, but will pray even for his enemy with his last breath.

Is it too difficult an ideal to follow? No. On the contrary, the conduct laid down in it is the only conduct worthy of the dignity of human beings.[5]

Birth and death are inevitable among mortals. What distinguishes the man from the brute is his conscious striving to realize the spirit within. The last eighteen verses of the Second Chapter of the *Gita* give in a nutshell the secret of the art of living. It is given there in the form of a description of a *Sthitaprajna* or the man of steady wisdom *i.e.*, a *Satyagrahi,* in reply to Arjuna's query to Lord Krishna.

The art of dying follows as a corollary from the art of living. Death must come to all. A man may die of a lightning stroke or as a result of heart failure or failure of respiration. But that is not the death that a *Satyagrahi* can wish for or pray for himself. The art of dying for a *Satyagrahi* consists in facing death cheerfully in the performance of one's duty.... It is not enough not to want to hurt or take the life of your enemy. You are no *Satyagrahis* if you remain silent or passive spectators while your enemy is being done to death. You must protect him even at the cost of your life. If thousands in India learnt that art, the face of India would be changed and no one would be able to point his finger of scorn at her non-violence as being a cloak for weakness.[6]

CHAPTER XI

MY OBSERVANCE OF THE GITA IDEAL

WHATEVER a man sows, that shall he reap. The Law of *Karma* is inexorable and impossible of evasion. There is thus hardly any need for God to interfere. He laid down the law and retired, as it were.[1]

I am a devotee of the *Gita* and a firm believer in the inexorable Law of *Karma*. Even the least little tripping or stumbling is not without its cause, and I have wondered why one who has tried to follow the *Gita* in thought, word and deed should have any ailment. The doctors have assured me that this trouble of high blood presure is entirely the result of mental strain and worry. If that is true, it is likely that I have been unnecessarily worrying myself, unnecessarily fretting and secretly harbouring passions like anger, lust, etc. The fact that any event or incident should disturb my mental equilibrium, inspite of my serious efforts, means not that the *Gita* ideal is defective, but that my devotion to it is defective. The *Gita* ideal is true for all time, my understanding of it and observance of it is full of flaws.[2]

Nothing Without Grace

GITA proclaims that every one that is born must die, and every one that dies must be born again. Every one comes, repays part of his obligation, and goes his way. I am positive that there is no disease without the existence within oneself of passion. Of course, even the man who is free from passion has also to die, but he drops off, without a disease or even a headache, like a ripe fruit dropping off the tree. I have aspired to and hoped for such a consummation. The hope still abides, but who knows? The passions are not yet extinct, and freedom from them looks like a far off thing.[3]

The introspection has revealed vital defects in my following out the interpretation of the *Gita* as I have understood it. I have discovered that I have not approached with adequate detachment the innumerable problems that have presented themselves for solution. It is clear that I have taken many of them to heart and allowed them to rouse my emotional being and thus affect my nerves. In other words, they have not, as they should have in a votary of the *Gita,* left my body or mind untouched. I verilly believe that one who literally follows the prescription of the Eternal Mother, need never grow old in mind. Such a one's body will wither in due course like leaves of a healthy tree, leaving the mind as young and as fresh as ever. That seems to me to be the meaning of Bhishma delivering his marvellous discourse to Yudhishthira, though he was on his death-bed. Medical friends were never tired of warning me against being excited over or affected by events happening around me. Extra precautions were taken, to keep from me news of a tragic character. Though, I think, I was not quite so bad a devotee of the *Gita* as their precautions led me to suppose, there was undoubtedly substance behind them. For, I discovered with what a wrench I accepted conditions and demand that I should remove from Maganwadi to Mahila Ashram. Any way, I had lost credit for detached action. The fact of the collapse was eloquent enough testimony for discrediting my vaunted detachment. I must plead guilty to the condemnation.

The worst, however, was to follow. I have been trying to follow *Brahmacharya* consciously and deliberately since 1899. My definition of it is purity, not merely of body but of both speech and thought also. With the exception of what must be regarded as one lapse, I can recall no instance during more than thirty-six years' constant and conscious effort, of mental disturbance such as I experienced during this illness. I was disgusted with myself. The moment the feeling came, I acquainted my attendants and the medical friends with my condition. They could give me no help. I expected none. I broke loose after the experience from the rigid rest that was imposed upon me. The confession of the wretched experience brought much relief to me. I felt as if a great load had been raised from over me. It enabled me to pull myself together before any harm could be done.

But what of the *Gita*? Its teaching is clear and precise. A mind that is once hooked to the Star of stars becomes incorruptible. How far I must be from Him, He alone knows. Thank God, my much vaunted *Mahatmaship* has never fooled me. But this enforced rest has humbled me as never before. It has brought to the surface my limitations and imperfections. But I am not so much ashamed of them, as I should be of hiding them from the public. My faith in the message of the *Gita* is as bright as ever. Unwearied ceaseless effort is the price that must be paid for turning that faith into rich infallible experience. But the same *Gita* says, without any equivocation, that the experience is not to be had without Divine grace. We should develop swelled heads if Divinity had not made that ample reservation.[4]

That grace can be obtained by repeating His name all the twenty-four hours, and by realizing that He resides within us.[5]

Karma Alone Powerless

SO many things have happened in my life for which I had intense longing, but which I could never have achieved myself. And I have always said to my co-workers that it was in answer to my prayers. I did not say to them it was in answer to my intellectual effort to lose myself in the Divinity in me! The easiest and the correct thing for me was to say 'God has seen me through by difficulty.'

"But that you deserved by your *Karma*. God is Justice and not Mercy. You are a good man and good things happen to you."

No, I fear, I am not good enough for things to happen like that. If I went about with that philosophical conception of *Karma,* I should often come a cropper. My *Karma* would not come to my help. Although I believe in the inexorable Law of *Karma,* I am striving to do so many things, every moment of my life is a strenuous endeavour, which is an attempt to build up more *Karma,* to undo the past and add to the present. It is, therefore, wrong to say that because my past is good, good is happening at present. The past would be soon exhausted and I have to build up the future with prayer. I tell you *Karma* alone is powerless. "Ignite this match," I say to myself, and yet I cannot, if there is no co-operation from without. Before I strike the match, my hand is paralyzed or I have only one match and the wind blows it out. Is it an accident or God or High Power? Well, I prefer to use the language of my ancestors or of children. I am no better than a child. We may try to talk learnedly and of books, but when it comes to face facts—when we are face to face with a calamity—we behave like children and begin to cry and pray, and our intellectual belief gives no satisfaction.[6]

CHAPTER XII

THE GITA AND FASTING

FASTING can help to curb animal passion, only if it is undertaken with a view to self-restraint. Some of my friends have actually found their animal passion and palate stimulated as an after-effect of fasts. That is to say, fasting is futile unless it is accompanied by an incessant longing for self-restraint. The famous verse from the Second Chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* is worth noting in this connection :

'For a man who is fasting his senses
Outwardly, the sense-objects disappear,
Leaving the yearning behind; but when
He has seen the Highest,
Even the yearning disappears.'

Fasting and similar discipline is, therefore, one of the means to the end of self-restraint, but it is not all, and if physical fasting is not accompanied by mental fasting, it is bound to end in hypocrisy and disaster.[1]

The *Gita* says in one place that those who pretend self-control outwardly, but who crave for sensual pleasures in their hearts, are foolish and deceitful. In regard to those who are honestly sincere, the *Gita* teaches that they should constantly control the passions that agitate them.[2]

If the mind is not pure, no amount of physical restraints would avail. The *Gita* teaches us that the man who restrains the organs of action, whilst he allows the mind to run after the objects of the senses, is a hypocrite. We may fail to restrain the mind, but let us not be hypocrites. If we fail, let us own up rather than be guilty of the double sin of untruth and want of restraint. For, not only telling lies is untruth, but guilty silence or hiding one's state of mind is also untruth.[3]

Truly has the Seer said in the *Gita* that 'desire persists though man may by fasting keep his body under restraint. Desire goes only when one has seen God face to face.'[4]

No Prayer without Fasting

THE expression 'There is no prayer without fasting is thoroughly sound. Here fasting has to be of the widest character possible. Fasting of the body has to be accompanied by fasting of all the senses. And अल्पाहार the meagre food of the *Gita*, is also a fasting of the body. The *Gita* enjoins not temperance in food but 'meagreness'; meagreness is a perpetual fast. Meagreness means just enough to sustain the body for the service for which it is made. The test is again supplied by saying that food should be taken as one takes medicine in measured doses, at measured times and as required, not for taste but for the welfare of the body.* 'Meagreness' is perhaps better rendered by 'measured quantities'. I cannot recall Arnold's rendering. A 'full' meal is, therefore, a crime against God and man—the latter because the full-mealers deprive their neighbours of their portion. God's economy provides from day to day just enough food for all in just medicinal doses. We are all of the tribe of full-mealers. Instinctively to know the medicinal dose required is a

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*"Food has to be taken as we take medicine, that is, without thinking whether it is palatable or otherwise, and only in quantities limited to the needs of the body. Just as medicine taken in too small a dose does not take effect or the full effect, and as too large a dose injures the system, so it is with food."

—*From Yeravda Mandir:* p. 15, (1930)

Herculean task, for, by parental training we are gluttons. Then, when it is almost too late, it dawns upon some of us that food is made not to enjoy but to sustain the body as our slave. It becomes from that moment a grim fight against inherited and acquired habit of eating for pleasure. Hence the necessity for a complete fast at intervals and partial fasts for ever. Partial fast is the meagre or measured food of the *Gita*. Thus 'there is no prayer without fasting' is a scientific proposition, capable of verification by experiments and experience.[5]

Meagre Food of the Gita

THE passage you quote from the *Gita* refers to moderate habits. That is not what I had in mind. The passage I had in mind occurs in the Last Chapter, 52nd verse. I should translate it thus: "Who prefers solitude, who eats meagre food, who has under perfect control thought, speech and action; who is intent on meditation, who is free always from attachments."

You have no reason to complain of the quantity of your food. You dare not go by the abstract measurement. Double your quantity would be really meagre for many of our friends. The condition of your own body should be the sole guide as to the quantity without any reference to that taken by others. All we should recognize is that voluntary meagre eating is one of the most difficult things in the world. It is a perpetual fast, much more difficult than the complete periodic fasts. Meagre food, voluntarily taken, *must* lead to perfect poise *i.e.*, perfect health of body and mind. We can but make the attempt.[6]

I have always found Arnold's to be, on the whole, a more helpful translation than any other. "Abstemious" is a wrong word. "Spare diet" is a good expression. अल्प

means less than enough. What is enough is a matter of conjecture; therefore, our own mental picture. The man of truth, knowing that man is always indulgent to the body, said, in order to counteract the indulgence, that he should take less food than what he would think was enough; then there was likelihood of his taking what in fact was enough. So, what we often think is spare or meagre, is likely even to be more than enough. More people are weak through overfeeding or wrong feeding than through under-feeding. It is wonderful, if we chose the right diet, what an extraordinarily small quantity would suffice.[7]

CHAPTER XIII

DEFINITION OF KNOWLEDGE

THE intelligence becomes keener as faith grows deeper. Indeed, the *Gita teaching* seems to be this that it is for God to endow us with understanding, while it is for man to become richer and richer in faith. We have to grasp the implications of faith (*Shraddha*) and understanding (*Buddhi*), but this grasp, too, is obtained not by the study of definitions but by real humility. He who thinks that he knows, knows nothing. He who thinks that he knows nothing, acquires knowledge in God's good time. Even Almighty God cannot pour a single drop of water into a pitcher that is full to the brim. We have, therefore, every day to stand before God as beggars with empty hands.[1]

Thoughts which turn us away from God, or do not turn us towards Him, constitute impediments in our way. In this connection, we may consider the definition of Knowledge contained in the Thirteenth Chapter of the *Gita*. We are there told that humility (*Amanitvam*), etc., constitute knowledge, and all the rest is ignorance. If this is true,—and there is no doubt that it is true,—much that we hug to-day as knowledge is ignorance pure and simple, and, therefore, only does us harm instead of conferring any benefit. It makes the mind wander, and even reduces it to a vacuity, and discontent flourishes in endless ramifications of evil. Needless to say, this is not a plea for inertia. Every moment of our life should be filled with mental or physical activity, but that activity should be *Sattvika,* tending to Truth. One who consecrates his life to service cannot be idle for a single moment. But one has to learn to distinguish between good activity and evil activity. This discernment goes naturally with a single-minded devotion to service.[2]

If we thrive on knowledge, we seem somehow to do so on ignorance and imagination, too. "It is folly to be wise when ignorance is bliss." And the shortest and the oldest *Upanishad* says: "He overcomes death through ignorance and mounts to immortality through knowledge." The original words are अविद्य: and विद्य; meaning also, respectively, activity and inactivity, body and spirit attachment and detachment. They can be made to mean several other things without doing violence to the text. It is a very simple and lofty *Upanishad* and it is also abstruse. It is an epitome of all knowledge like the *Gita*. The latter is, perhaps, a commentary on the former. An old commentator or rather devotee of the *Gita* compares the *Upanishads* to cows, the *Gita* to milk and Krishna to the cow-boy who milks them.[3]

Wandering Thoughts

WANDERING thoughts can never be a stage in spiritual development. They do trouble most of us; hence the usual emphasis laid on mental concentration. What we have to bear in mind is this. We think a multitude of thoughts which involve a waste of mental energy, even as sensuality results in the waste of vital energy. Just as physical debility affects the mind, so also mental debility affects the body. Therefore, I understand *Brahmacharya* in a comprehensive sense and look upon aimless thinking as a breach of it. We have made *Brahmacharya* difficult to achieve by understanding it in a narrow sense. But if we accept the broader definition and try to restrain all the eleven organs of sense, the control of animal passion becomes comparatively very much easier. You seem to think that external action leaves little time for a review of mental purification. But my experience is just the reverse of it. Without mental purity, external action cannot be performed in a selfless spirit. Therefore, mental purity can be measured in terms of the purity of external action. One who tries to attain mental purity without purifying external action, runs the risk of going astray. I can think of many a case of that type. A marvellous verse* in the *Gita* (III.5) lays down a law which physicists have shown is universal in application. It may be translated thus : †No one can remain even for a moment without doing work. Work here means motion of inanimate as well as animate beings. It is characteristic of human being that they may obey this law in a selfless spirit. There are two equally marvellous ‡verses in *Ishopanishad* which are complementary to the *Gita* verse.

I am, therefore, of opinion that real and lasting purity of mind can only be attained through continuous work. We are told in Verse 18 of the Fourth Chapter of the *Gita* that he who sees inaction in action and action in inaction, is a wise and perfect worker, a *Yogi*. All this is a part of my own experience.§

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*न हि कश्चित क्षणमपि जातु तिष्ठत्यकर्म कृत् ।
कार्यते ह्यवंशः कर्म सर्वः प्रकृतिजैर्गुणैः ॥

†Radhakrishnan's *Bhagvad Gita,* Allen and Unwin. Ed.

‡The reference here is to कुर्वन्नेवेह कर्माणि जिजीविषेत् शतं समाः **and** कृतं स्मर । **Ed.**

§"In the language of the *Bhagavad Gita,* very often action lies in inaction and inaction in action. Thus in modern warfare, very often inactivity is obligatory and can, therefore, be described as real activity, and at such a time any activity, so-called, would savour of criminality."

— *Harijan :* April 6, 1947.

I have cited the verses because the *Gita* doctrine tallies with it. I never cite scripture unless I have subjected it to the test of personal experience.* The experience of others may be different from mine and they, too, may perhaps find a *Gita* verse in support of it. It is also possible that they might interpret these verses in a different way in order to seek corroboration of their experience. I may not, therefore, insist upon my experience being acknowledged as valid by all.[4]

Conquest of Senses

REMEMBER my definition of *Brahmacharya*. It means not suppression of one or more senses, but complete mastery over them all. The two states are fundamentally different. I can suppress all my senses to-day, but it may take aeons to conquer them. Conquest means *using* them as my willing slaves. I can prick the ear drum and suppress the sense of hearing by a simple, painless operation. This is worthless. I must train the ear so that it refuses to hear gossip, lewd talk, blasphemy; but it is open to the celestial music, it will hear the most distant cry for succour from thousands of miles. Saint Ramdas is said to have done so. Then, how to use the organs of generation? By transmitting the most creative energy that we possess from creating counterparts of our flesh into creating constructive work for the whole of life, *i.e.*, for the soul. We have to rein in the animal passion and change it into celestial passion. Read here V. 64, Chap. II of the *Gita*. The burden of the Divine Song is not "fly from the battle,

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*"I exercise my judgement about every scripture, including the *Gita*. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason."

— ***Harijan*: Dec. 5, 1936.**

but face it without attachment." Therefore, you and I and every one of us have to stand unmoved in the midst of all kinds of men and women. There is no physical seclusion except temporarily for some.[5]

CHAPTER XIV

A VOTARY OF THE GITA

A VOTARY of the *Gita* never imagines anything. *Good and bad are after all relative terms. He takes note of things as they happen and reacts naturally to them, fulfilling his part as if propelled by the Great Mechanic, even as a piece of machine in good order responds automatically to the call of the mechanist. It is the most difficult thing for an intelligent being to be like a machine. And yet, if one is to become a hero, that is precisely what one desiring perfection has to become. The vital difference between the machine and the man is that the machine is inert, the man is all life and consciously becomes like a machine in the hands of the Master Mechanic. Krishna says in so many words, that God moves all beings as if they were parts of a machine.[1]

Happiness of the Gita

IN a manner, everybody trains himself to do without things when he cannot get them. A follower of the *Gita dharma* trains himself to do without things with *happiness*, called equanimity in the *Gita* language, for happiness of the *Gita* is not the opposite of unhappiness. It is superior to that state. The devotee of the *Gita* is neither happy, nor unhappy. And when that state is reached, there is no pain, no pleasure, no victory, no defeat, no deprivation, no possession. Prison life is a life of privilege, if we learn

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*" 'Take no thought for the morrow' has got to be literally followed by one who will enforce in his own life the teaching of the *Gita*."

— *Bapu's Letters to Mira :* p. 159.

to practise the *Gita* teaching. It is easier in the prison than outside. For, outside we have the opportunity of picking and choosing. Hence, we are not always able to test ourselves. In the prison, there are various jarring occasions. Are we able to bear them with equanimity? If we are, it is well with us.[2]

Thus we are made to feel now and then that we are prisoners, and given the opportunity to practise the *Gita* doctrine. When we cannot get what we want, we find out if the deprivation disturbs our peace of mind. If it does, it shows that we have much headway to make up. I, therefore, try to preserve my equanimity. We may ask only for what we are entitled to. If we get it, it is all right. If we do not get it, then also it is all right.[3]

We have to acquire the faculty of keeping well under all weathers—a difficult task I know. But it is not beyond human reach. The mind plays a great part in it. If we can completely detach ourselves from the externals in terms of the Sixth Chapter, we can attain that state. That it appears to be beyond our reach for the present, need not baffle us. The author of the *Gita* invites us to the effort and says from his abundant experience that it never fails. It may take long but success is a certainty.[4]

I know that there is a school of philosophy which teaches complete inaction and futility of all effort. I have not been able to appreciate that teaching. In my humble opinion, effort is necessary for one's own growth. It has to be irrespective of results.[5]

'To work thou hast the right, never to the fruit thereof'—is one of the golden precepts of the *Gita*.[6]

To work you have the right and duty and not to the fruit thereof, says the *Gita*. . . That is the teaching of all our religious books. Let the people rail at me, insult me if they like. I am not going to pay them in their coin. Mine is the religion of *Tapashcharya,* the way of penance taught by the scriptures and by Tulsidas. That is the law of my being and I cannot do otherwise. 'The whole creation,' says the *Gita,* 'follows the law of its being. How will restraint then avail?' My joy is in the fulfilment of my duty.[7]

The author of the *Gita* has said that all undertakings are tainted. Therefore, all action should be performed with complete detachment.[8]

To be detached from fruits of actions is not to be ignorant of them, or to disregard or disown them. To be detached is never to abandon action because the contemplated result may not follow. On the contrary, it is proof of immovable faith in the certainty of the contemplated result following in due course.[9]

Renunciation through Action

I BELIEVE in the doctrine of renunciation, but I hold that renunciation should be sought for in and through action. That action is the *sine qua non* of life in the body, that the Wheel of Life cannot go on even for a second without involving some sort of action, goes without saying. Renunciation can, therefore, in these circumstances, only mean detachment or freedom of the spirit from action, even while the body is engaged in action. A follower of the path of renunciation seeks to attain it not by refraining from all activity, but by carrying it on in a perfect spirit of detachment and altruism as a pure trust. Thus a man may engage in farming, spinning or any other activity without departing from the path of renunciation, provided one does so merely for selfless service and remains free from the taint of egoism or attachment.[10]

The doctrine of labouring without attachment means as much a relentless pursuit of Truth as a retracing after discovery of error and a renunciation of leadership without a pang after discovery of unworthiness. I have but shadowed forth my intense longing to lose myself in the Eternal and become merely a lump of clay in the Potter's divine hands so that my service may become more certain because uninterrupted by the baser self in me.[11]

Life—a Perpetual Striving

IS not struggle the law in the natural world? If it is, much more so is it the law in the spiritual world. There is a spiritual law in the natural world and a natural law in the spiritual world. Life is a perpetual striving. There is always a tempest raging in us, and struggle against temptation is perpetual duty. The *Gita* says this at not less than three places. I dare say there are many more places, but I remember only three. One needs must have the will and then, you know the English proverb, there's the way. And there are those Biblical sayings: 'Ask and it shall be given', 'Seek and you shall find,' 'Knock and it shall be open."[12]

The True Devotee

THE *Gita* has defined the *Bhakta*—the true devotee—in three places and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a *Bhakta* is hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have, therefore, suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who serves his fellowmen. That is why Narasinha Mehta who 'saw and knew' sang: 'He is a true *Vaishnava* who knows to melt at other's woe.' Such was Abu Ben Adhem. He served his fellowmen and, therefore, his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woe-begone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a *Bhakta,* therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he, who regards the 'suppressed' classes as untouchables, serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor, and trots out lame excuses, does not know the meaning of service. An able-bodied wretch deserves no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor inviting them to do likewise, serves God as no one else does. 'He who gives Me even a trifle such as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of *Bhakti* is My servant,' says the Lord in the *Bhagavad Gita.* And He hath His footstool where live 'the humble, the lowliest and the lost.' Spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.[13]

There can never be too much emphasis placed on work. I am simply repeating the gospel taught by the *Gita* where the Lord says: 'If I did not remain ever at work sleeplessly, I should set a wrong example to mankind.[14]

Selfish vs. Selfless Activity

TO tread the path of Truth and to eschew all activity—this is a contradiction in terms. If a man is not active, how can we say anything about the path he has taken? To tread the path of Truth implies an active life in the world of men. In the absence of such activity, there is no occasion for either pursuing or swerving from Truth. The *Gita* has made it clear that a man cannot remain inactive even for a single moment. The difference, between one who is a devotee of God and another who is not, is that the former is active in the service of others, never gives up Truth in the midst of activity and gradually overcomes his likes and dislikes; while the other is active for selfish reasons and has no scruples whatever as regards the means he employs in order to achieve his selfish ends. This world is not something evil in itself, for only an active life in the world can help us to attain the goal of God-realization. This activity must be directed to the good of others. Selfish activity is fit only to be condemned and should be given up.[15]

The *Gita* is such a transcendental book that men of every creed, age and clime may read it with respect, and find in it the principles of their respective religions. Shri Krishna served the people all his life, he was a real servant of the people. He could have led the hosts at Kurukshetra, but he preferred to be Arjuna's charioteer. His whole life was one unbroken *Gita* of *Karma*. Krishna knew no sleep or idleness. He kept sleepless vigil for the world; we, his posterity, have become indolent and forgotten the use of our hands. In *Bhagavad Gita*, Lord Krishna has shown the path of *Bhakti*—which means the path of *Karma*. Lokamanya Tilak has shown that whether we desire to be *Bhaktas*, or *Jnanis, Karma* is the only way, but that *Karma* should not be for self but for others. Action for one's own self binds, action for the sake of others delivers from bondage. What can be the altruistic action which can be universally done, by Hindus, Mussalmans, Christians, by men, women, and children? I have tried to demonstrate that spinning alone is that sacrificial act, for that alone can make us do something in God's name, something for the poorest, something that can infuse activity in their idle limbs. Lord Krishna has also taught that to be a true *Bhakta,* we should make no difference between a *Brahmin* and a scavenger. If that is true, there can be no place for untouchability in Hinduism. He who swears by the *Gita* may know no distinction between Hindu and Mussalman, for Lord Krishna has declared that he who adores God in a true spirit by what name soever adores Him. The path of *Bhakti, Karma,* Love as expounded in the *Gita,* leaves no room for the despising of man by man.[16]

CHAPTER XV

THE GITA AND THE DOCTRINE OF EQUALITY

I BELIEVE in the doctrine of equality as taught by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*. The *Gita* teaches us that members of all the four castes should be treated on an equal basis. It does not prescribe the same *dharma* for the *Brahmin* as for the *Bhangi*. But it insists that the latter shall be entitled to the same measure of consideration and esteem as the former with all his superior learning. It is, therefore, our duty to see that the 'untouchables' do not feel that they are despised or looked down upon. Let them not be offered leavings from our plates for their subsistence. How can I accord differential treatment to any person, be he a *Brahmin* or a *Bhangi*, who worships the same God and keeps his body and soul pure and clean? I for one would regard myself as having sinned if I gave to a *Bhangi* unclean food from the leavings from the kitchen, or failed to render him personal assistance when he was in need.[1]

We have to develop in ourselves the quality of looking upon all as equals as laid down in the *Gita*.[2]

We must, in the language of the *Gita*, learn to treat the *Brahmin* and the *Bhangi* with equal regard. No human being could be unclean by birth. If we would search for unclean things, we have only to dive into our own minds, where we would find a multitude of evil thoughts worthy of being treated as outcastes. Bathing is all very well, but even buffaloes have long daily baths.

He only is pure who walks in the fear of God and serves His creatures.[3]

Whilst it is sinful to regard a single human being as an untouchable, I can introduce you to some untouchables whom you have to shun at any cost, and these are the evil thoughts which make us do all sorts of evil things from day to day. They need to be banished.[4]

For us Hindus, the *Gita* enjoins on us the lesson of equality. We are to cherish the same feelings towards a learned *Brahmin* as towards a *chandala,* a dog, a cow and an elephant.[5]

I am not after extinguishing all differences. Who can destroy natural differences? Is there no difference between a *Brahmin,* a dog and a dog-eater? And yet the *Gita* says:

> *"The men who have realized the Truth look with an equal eye on a learned and cultured Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog and a dog-eater."*

There is a difference between them, but the man who knows the Science of Life will say that there is no difference between them in status, as there is none between an elephant and an ant, a savage and a savant. Of course, the savage may be awe-struck before a savant; but the latter should not have any sense of superiority. No, we are all equal in the eye of the law and God. That is the ideal we have to live up to.[6]

The great message of the *Bhagavad Gita* is: Treat the *Brahmin* and the *Bhangi* alike, if you would but know God. But how are they alike? A *Brahmin* is any day superior to the *Bhangi* in learning, and how am I to treat both alike? The *Bhagavad Gita* says that you should treat them even as you would wish to be treated by them, or even as you would treat yourself:

आत्मवत्सर्वभुतेषु यः पश्यति स पश्यति ।

That is the teaching of the *Bhagavad Gita.*[7]

My Views on Untouchability

MY views on untouchability are not the product of my Western education. I had formed them long before I went to England, and long before I studied the scriptures, and in an atmosphere which was by no means favourable to those views. For I was born in an orthodox *Vaishnava* family and yet, ever since I reached the years of discretion, I have firmly held my uncompromising views in the matter, which later comparative study of Hinduism and experience have only confirmed. How in face of the fact that no scriptural text mentions a fifth *Varna,* and in face of the express injunction of the *Gita* to regard a *Brahmin* and a *Bhangi* as equals, we persist in maintaining this deep blot on Hinduism, I cannot understand. Regarding a *Brahmin* and a *Bhangi* as equals, does not mean that you will not accord to a true *Brahmin* the reverence that is due to him, but that the *Brahmin* and the *Bhangi* are equally entitled to our service, that we accord to the *Bhangi* the same rights of sending his children to public schools, of visiting public temples, of the use of public wells, etc., on the same basis as these rights are enjoyed by any other Hindu. . . . What shall I say of the attitude that persists in holding up a wholly irreligious practice as religious? Let us, therefore, search ourselves and purge our hearts of all narrowness, let us realize that it is a just Nemesis that is punishing us in South Africa and that our treatment of our brethren is no less iniquitous than the White man's treatment of our countrymen in South Africa.[8]

A Sanatanist's Conclusions

A *PANDIT* writes :

"As an humble admirer of your noble personality, I have always tried to follow your habit of free thinking and free speaking according to my own convictions. As regards the controversy about the removal of untouchability and entry into temples, I have devoted a good deal of close thinking to the study of the problem in its various aspects, and at last, arrived at certain conclusions which are fundamentally at variance with yours. With highest regard for your superior wisdom, I beg to note down in brief outlines the chief points and principles on which I have failed to concur with you.

(1) You are reported to have said to the effect that *Gita* is the only scripture of unquestionable authority which alone should be our true guide in matters social, religious and spiritual. Such a view is untenable on the following grounds :

(a) *Gita* is an excellent treatise on philosophy and theology, but it does not deal with social legislation.

(b) *Gita* is only a small portion of a larger work, namely, the *Mahabharata,* and there is no reason why a particular portion, however good in itself, should be accepted to the exclusion of the rest.

(c) *Gita* is a compendium of the subtlest philosophical thoughts and spiritual mysticism, and as such its true purport is not intelligible to the laymen of the world. The religion of the *Gita* may be understood and practised only by a fortunate few, but it cannot be the basis of social discipline or popular theocracy.

(2) The sources of Hindu religion are enumerated in the first chapter of the *Manusanhita*. There is no valid reason for its rejection on the mere suspicion of interpolations.

(3) Scriptures are clearly distinguishable into two classes:

(a) those dealing with high principles of philosophy and directions for spiritual advancement,

(b) and others laying down laws for social discipline and prescribing penalties for lapses and crime.

(4) In dealing with the society and the socio-religious institutions, we must recognise and abide by the authority of the *Sanhitas*, which are professedly concerned with the social discipline and socio-religious legislation.

(5) The noble ideal of Vedantic Monism, Pantheism or Panatheism has no application to the problems of social organization or reform, for the simple reason that a whole people can never soar to that height.

(6) Humanism is admittedly the highest form of religious idealism, but for all practical purposes it must remain the private property of the saints and *siddha purushas*. There are inequalities in the society, both in natural endowments and personal habits. No amount of love or legislative efforts will do away with these inequalities between man and man.

(7) According to the abstract theory of justice, we cannot condone invidious distinction between

> man and man for the mere accident of birth or the mistaken choice of profession. But, in dealing with men, we must face the stern reality and admit the necessity of differential treatment between different castes and classes of people.
>
> (8) The Hindu law-makers were not insensible to the theoretical rights of men, nor were they actuated by the pride of caste or racial hatred. As eminently practical men, they pocketed their superior philosophy of universal brotherhood and cosmopolitan sympathy and laid down different laws for different castes and classes of people.
>
> With these observations, I beg to request you to reconsider the position which you have taken up with regard to the temple-entry question, and, if it is not impossible to convince the orthodox people who are always open to conviction."

It would have been much better if the *Pandit* had quoted my very words about the *Gita*, as he would at once have seen the difference between what I am reported to have said and what I have actually written. This is what I wrote:

> "It is the one open book to every Hindu who will care to study it, and if all the other scriptures were reduced to ashes, the seven hundred verses of this imperishable booklet are quite enough to tell one what Hinduism is and how one can live up to it. And I claim to be a *Sanatanist*, because for forty years I have been seeking literally to live up to the teachings of that book. Whatever is contrary to its main theme, I reject as Un-Hindu. It excludes no faith and no teacher."

The *Pandit* and the reader will see that there is a very wide difference between what I have actually said and what is attributed to me and, that being the case, the grounds for showing the untenability of a position I have never taken up become irrelevant.

Similarly with reference to the Code of Manu, I never rejected the whole of it on "the mere suspicion of interpolation"; and as to interpolations, they are more than a suspicion, for what I consider as interpolations are clearly in contravention of the fundamentals laid down in the *Gita*, and, for that matter, in Manu's Code itself. The following is Manu's touchstone of religion:

विद्वभ्दिः सेवितः सभ्दिर्नित्यमद्वेषरागिभिः
हृदयेनाम्यनुज्ञातो यो धर्मस्तं निबोधत ॥

—*Manu* : II-1

> "Whatever is always followed by the learned, the good and those who are free from anger and attachment and whatever is experienced in the heart, know that to be religion."

Another text is, again, from the same Code:

धृतिः क्षमा दमो ऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः
धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥

—*Manu* : VI-92.

> "Steadfastness, forgiveness, restraint, non-stealing, purity, control of the senses, intelligence, learning, truth, freedom from anger, these ten are the touchstone of religion."

Accordingly, whatever is clearly contrary to this touchstone must be rejected as an interpolation.

The *Pandit* has summarily dismissed the ideals of Hinduism about equality and justice, by regarding them as the private property of the saints, forgetting that ideals and saints become perfectly useless if the practice of the poor sinners can never approach the ideals and their repositories, the saints. What is that justice "which will not condone invidious distinction between man and man but will make us face the stern reality and admit the necessity of differential treatment between different castes and classes of people?" Who are the different castes and what is the differential treatment between them? For instance, among the *Banias*, whom I should know best, there are about 50 castes. I know of no differential treatment between them. Nor do I find any authority for the formation of these castes in the *Smritis*. There are as many castes among the *Brahmins* as there are leaves in the little tree under which I am sitting, but I do not find any *Smriti* which enumerates these castes and the differential treatment. I have a shrewd suspicion that these gentlemen will fight to the last ditch any attempt made to mete out differential treatment to them, and some of them may even, like my non-*Brahmin* friends, consign to the flames Sanskrit verses printed and stitched together and passed off as divinely inspired *Smritis*.[9]

CHAPTER XVI

THE GITA AND THE LAW OF VARNA

VARNA, as I understand it, is an economic law which operates, whether we know it or not. Conformation to it will bring happiness to mankind. Disregard for it is disrupting society to-day all over the world. *Varna* is the antithesis of the doctrine of 'might is right'. It abolishes all distinctions between high and low.

"But nobody gives the meaning you give to *Varna*?"

That may be. Evolution of human thought is evolution of the meaning of words. I have no difficulty in seeing my meaning in the original *mantra* from which the theory of *Varna* is derived, nor in the *Gita* verses referring to *Varna*. Regulations about dining and marriage have no direct connection with *Varna*. The distinguishing feature of *Varna* is occupation.

"Then, you will restrict every one to his father's occupation?"

Neither I nor anybody else can impose the restriction on any one. *Varnadharma* is not a man-made law to be imposed or relaxed at his will. It is natural to man in his regenerate state. He may disregard it to his cost. Every one is free to follow or disobey it. It was discovered in India and followed more or less faithfully and knowingly for centuries. It is being followed ignorantly and helplessly even now by the bulk of the people. In the eye of that law, *Brahmin* and *Bhangi* are absolutely on an equal footing. A *Bhangi* who does his work willingly and faithfully will find favour with God. A *Brahmin* who, no matter how learned he may be, does not follow his calling will incur divine displeasure. The law does not confer privileges, it defines duties. Truest democracy can be evolved only by a due recognition of and obedience to the law. Thus, in my opinion, there is no evil in *Varna*. The evil consists in considering one *Varna* as higher than another.

"Surely, the *Varna* that you describe exists only in your imagination! What we see around us is the solid fact of hundreds of castes, each claiming to be higher than some other."

That is unfortunately so. I am simply answering your question and showing you the vital difference between caste and *Varna*. Castes are a human manufacture, are daily weakening and have to go. *Varna, as* defined by me, may be said to exist in my imagination. Its definition is not imaginary. It is inherent in the *mantra* on which it is based and is given in so many words in the *Bhagavad Gita*.[1]

My Definition of Varna

Q. We do not understand your emphasis on *Varnadharma*. Can you justify the present caste system? What is your definition of *Varna*?

A. '*Varna*' means pre-determination of the choice of man's profession. The Law of *Varna* is that a man shall follow the profession of his ancestors for earning his livelihood. Every child naturally follows the 'colour' of his father, or choose his father's profession. *Varna*, therefore, is in a way the Law of Heredity. *Varna* is not a thing that is superimposed on Hindus; but men who were trustees for their welfare discovered the law for them. It is not a human invention, but an immutable law of Nature—the statement of a tendency that is ever present and at work like Newton's Law of Gravitation. Just as the Law of Gravitation existed even before it was discovered, so did the Law of *Varna*. It was given to the Hindus to discover that law. By their discovery and application of certain laws of Nature, the peoples of the West have easily increased their material possessions. Similarly, Hindus by their discovery of this irresistible social tendency have been able to achieve in the spiritual field what no other nation in the world has achieved.

Varna has nothing to do with caste. Caste is an excrescence, just like untouchability, upon Hinduism. All the excrescences that are emphasized to-day were never part of Hinduism. But don't you find similar ugly excrescences in Christianity and Islam also? Fight them as much as you like. Down with the monster of caste that masquerades in the guise of *Varna*. It is this travesty of *Varna* that has degraded Hinduism and India. Our failure to follow the Law of *Varna* is largely responsible both for our economic and spiritual ruin. It is one cause of unemployment and impoverishment, and it is responsible for untouchability and defections from our faith.

But in quarrelling with the present monstrous form and monstrous practices to which the original Law has been reduced, do not fight the Law itself.

Q. How many *Varnas* are there?

A. Four *Varnas*, though it is not a rigid division inherent in *Varna* itself. The *Rishis* after incessant experiment and research arrived at this fourfold division—the four ways of earning one's livelihood.

Q. Logically, therefore, there are as many *Varnas* as there are professions?

A. Not necessarily. The different professions can easily be brought under the four main divisions—that of teaching, of defending, of wealth-producing, and of manual service. So far as the world is concerned, the dominant profession is the wealth-producing, just as *Grihastha Ashrama* is the most dominant amongst all *Ashramas. Vaishya* is the keynote among the *Varnas.* The defender is not wanted, if there is no wealth and property. The first two and the fourth are necessary because of the third. The first will always be very few because of the severe discipline required for it, the second must be few in a well ordered society, and so the fourth.

Q. If a man practises a profession which does not belong to him by birth, what *Varna* does he belongs to?

A. According to the Hindu belief, he belongs to the *Varna* in which he is born, but by not living up to it he will be doing violence to himself and becomes a degraded being—a *patita.*

Q. A *Shudra* does an act which belongs to a *Brahmin* by birth. Does he become a *patita*?

A. A *Shudra* has as much right to knowledge as a *Brahmin*, but he falls from his estate if he tries to gain his livelihood through teaching. In ancient times, there were automatic trade guilds, and it was an unwritten law to support all the members of the profession. A hundred years ago, a carpenter's son never wanted to become a lawyer. To-day he does, because he finds the profession the easiest way to steal money. The lawyer thinks that he must charge Rs. 15,000 as fees for the exercise of his brain, and a physician like Hakim Saheb* thinks that he must charge Rs. 1,000 a day for his medical advice!

Q. But may not a man follow a profession after his heart?

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*Ajmal Khan of Delhi.

A. But the only profession after his heart should be the profession of his fathers. There is nothing wrong in choosing that profession; on the contrary, it is noble. What we find to-day are freaks, and that is why there is violence and disruption of society. Let us not confound ourselves by superficial illustrations. There are thousands of carpenters' sons following their fathers' calling, but not even a hundred carpenters' sons who are lawyers. In ages gone by, there was not the ambition of encroaching on others' profession and amassing wealth. In Cicero's time, for instance, the lawyer's was honorary profession. And it would be quite right for any brainy carpenter to become a lawyer for service, not for money. Later, ambition for fame and wealth crept in. Physicians served the society and rested content with what it gave them, but now they have become traders and even a danger to society. The medical and the legal professions were deservedly called liberal, when the motive was purely philanthropic.

Q. All that is under ideal conditions. But what do you propose to-day when every one is hankering after paying professions ?

A. It is a sweeping generalization. Put together the number of boys studying in schools and colleges and determine the percentage of boys going in for the learned professions. Highway robbery is not open to every one. The present seems to be an agitation for highway robbery. How many can become lawyers and Government servants? Those who can be legitimately occupied in earning wealth are *Vaishyas*. Even there, when their profession becomes a highway robbery, it is hateful. There cannot be millions of millionaires.

Q. You have been saying that the Law of *Varna* curbs our worldly ambition. How?

A. When I follow my father's profession, I need not even go to a school to learn it, and my mental energy is set free for spiritual pursuits, because my money or rather livelihood is ensured. *Varna* is the best form of insurance for happiness and for real religious pursuit. When I concentrate my energy on other pursuits, I sell away my powers of self-realization or sell my soul for a mess of pottage.

Q. You talk of releasing the energies for spiritual pursuits. To-day, those who follow their father's professions have no spiritual culture at all—their very *Varna* unfits them for it.

A. We are talking with crooked notions of *Varna.* When *Varna* was really practised, we had enough leisure for spiritual training. Even now, you go to distant villages and see what spiritual culture villagers have as compared to the town-dwellers. These know no self-control.

But you have spotted the mischief of the age. Let us not try to be what others cannot be. I would not even learn the *Gita,* if every one who wished could not do it. That is why my whole soul rises against learning English for making money. We have to rearrange our lives so that we ensure to the millions the leisure that a fraction of us have to-day, and we cannot do it unless we follow the Law of *Varna.*

Q. You will excuse us, if we go back to the same question over and over again. We want to understand it properly. What is the *Varna* of a man practising different professions at different times?

A. It may not make any difference in his *Varna* so long as he gains his livelihood by following his father's profession. He may do anything he likes so long as he does it for love of service. But he who changes profession from time to time for the sake of gaining wealth, degrades himself and falls from *Varna*.

Q. A *Shudra* may have all the qualities of a *Brahmin* and yet may not be called a *Brahmin*?

A. He may not be called a *Brahmin* in this birth. And it is a good thing for him not to arrogate a *Varna* to which he is not born. It is a sign of true humility.

Q. Do you believe that qualities attaching to *Varna* are inherited and not acquired ?

A. They can be acquired. The inherited qualities can always be strengthened and new ones cultivated. But we need not, ought not, to seek new avenues for gaining wealth. We should be satisfied with those we have inherited from our forefathers so long as they are pure.

Q. Do you not find a man exhibiting qualities opposed to his family character ?

A. That is a difficult question. We do not know all our antecedents. But you and I do not need to go deeper into this question for understanding the Law of *Varna*, as I have endeavoured to explain to you. If my father is a trader and I exhibit the qualities of a soldier, I may without reward serve my country as a soldier, but must be content to earn my bread by trading.

Q. Caste, as we see it to-day, cosists only in restrictions about inter-dining and inter-marriage. Does preservation of *Varna* then mean keeping these restrictions?

A. No, not at all. In its purest state, there can be no restrictions.

Q. Can they be omitted ?

A. They can be, and *Varna* is preserved even by marrying into other *Varnas*.

Q. Then, the mother's *Varna* will be affected.

A. A wife follows the *Varna* of her husband.

Varnadharma in the Gita

Q. Is the doctrine of *Varnadharma,* as you have expounded it, to be found in our *Shastras,* or is it your own?

A. Not my own. I derive it from the *Bhagavad Gita.*

Q. Do you approve of the doctrine as given in *Manusmriti?*

A. The principle is there. But the applications do not appeal to me fully. There are parts of the book, which are open to grave objections. I hope that they are later interpolations.

Q. Does not *Manusmriti* contain a lot of injustice?

A. Yes, a lot of injustice to women and the so-called lower 'castes'. All is not *Shastra* that goes by that name. The *Shastras* so-called, therefore, need to be read with much caution.

Q. But you go by the *Bhagavad Gita.* It says *Varna* is according to *Guna* and *Karma.* How did you bring in birth?

A. I swear by the *Bhagavad Gita* because it is the only book in which I find nothing to cavil at. It lays down principles and leaves you to find the application for yourself. The *Gita* does talk of *Varna* being according to *Guna* and *Karma,* but *Guna* and *Karma* are inherited by birth. Lord Krishna says: All *Varnas* have been created by Me—चातुर्वर्ण्यं मया सृष्टम् — *i.e.,* I suppose by birth. The Law of *Varna* is nothing, if not by birth.

Q. But there is no superiority about *Varna?*

A. No, not at all, though I do say *Brahmanism* is the culmination of other *Varnas,* just as the head is the culmination of the body. It means capacity for superior service, but no superior status. The moment superior status is arrogated, it becomes worthy of being trampled under foot.[2]

Varna and Caste

WHERE are the four *Varnas* of the *Gita* to-day? *Varna* and caste are two entirely different things. The varieties of the latter are legion. I know of no authority for caste in the *Gita* or any other scripture. The *Gita* has prescribed four *Varnas* based on one's special aptitudes and corresponding duties. The number is only illustrative. It may be added to or reduced. I am convinced that to-day there is one *Varna* only, *viz., Shudra* or, say, *Adishudra*, Harijan, untouchable.[3]

Caste, in so far as it is based on untouchability, is an institution of the devil, and we must get rid of it at any cost. But I have explained repeatedly that caste expressed as *Varnadharma* is an eternal law which we may not break except at our own risk. There are many laws of Nature, which are still hidden from us. That does not mean that they are not in existence or that they do not operate in our lives. The Law of *Varna* was discovered by our ancestors ages ago; and, as I have understood and interpreted it, it has appeared to me a wholly beneficent law. But like many laws and institutions of Nature, this Law of *Varna* has been distorted, and we see it to-day in its hideous form. Man—Hindu man—has disfigured it and made it doubly hideous by tainting it with untouchability. *Varnadharma* is an economic law. It it my certain conviction that, if the whole world followed that law, the strife that we see around us would cease at once. It is pre-eminently a law of concord, never of discord.[4]

CHAPTER XVII

THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

I HAVE been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we 3:16 John of the *Bible*. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them? Some have said, and not without good reason, the *Gayatri* answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the *Gayatri mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then, as you are aware, I have, for years past, been swearing by the *Bhagavad Gita*, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *Kamadhenu*, my guide, my open sesame, on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a prayerful study before the *Kamadhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

But I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the *Ishopanishad*. I read it years ago with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the *Upanishads* and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the

Ishopanishad were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत्। It means, as I would translate, all this that we see in this great Universe is pervaded by God. Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them: तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथा। I divide these into two and translate them thus: Renounce it and enjoy it. There is another rendering which means the same thing, though: Enjoy what He gives you. Even so, you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part, मा गृध: कस्यस्विद्धनम् which means: Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession. All the other *mantras* of that ancient *Upanishad* are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*.

As I read the *mantra* in the light of the *Gita* or the *Gita* in the light of the *mantra*, I find that the *Gita* is a commentary on this *mantra*. It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the Socialist and the Communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true–and I hold it to be true–you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the Universe?

The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created, you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation, but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is, therefore, a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation.

As if this was not enough, the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought: 'Do not covet anybody's possession'. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter. No doubt, it will not satisfy the aspiration of him who does not believe in God and His undisputed sovereignty.[1]

Ishopanishad

> "YOU have spoken of the *Ishopanishad* and said that if the first verse alone survived and all the rest of the Hindu scriptures were destroyed, it would alone save religion from extinction. Perhaps, you know that that verse was a turning point in the life of Devendra Nath Tagore, the Poet's * father. Young Devendra Nath was in a mood of great depression when his father died, leaving the family estate highly encumbered. One day, while in this mood, a piece of printed paper was wafted by a passing breeze to where he was sitting. He picked it up. It was in Sanskrit which he had not learnt then. He took it

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*Rabindra Nath Tagore

> to the family *pandit* who read it out. It was the first verse of the *Ishopanishad.* 'Nectar poured into my soul,' says the Maharshi in his autobiography.
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> "The phrase about enjoying by renunciation puzzled me for long. One day (or night, to be correct) it flashed on me that the phrase but expressed a daily experience. What greater enjoyment is there than renouncing something one values to one—person or cause—which one holds dear."

The subject matter of the letter (from Shri Natarajan) is an evergreen. I try to the utmost of my ability to live the meaning that, in my ungrammatical way, I have ascribed to the *shloka.* Not being a reader of books, I never knew the instance quoted from Maharshi Devendra's life. It fortifies my belief that the first *mantra* of *Ishopanishad* is all that undiluted Hinduism—in other words, for me, religion—can have to give. The recitation of the 18 Chapters of the *Gita* is finished in one week at the morning prayer, and so it has gone on now for some years from week to week. The *Gita* is a commentary on the first verse of the *Ishopanishad.* And I feel, not without diffidence, that the interpretation that flashed on Shri Natarajan's mind reveals but the partial truth. As I understand it, his interpretation is only the well-worn doctrine of self-sacrifice, which is undoubtedly a common enough experience. Take only one instance. Many a mother sacrifices all for her children But the *mantra* referred to here was not revealed to confirm the truth of that practice, well-known even during the remote times when it is said to have been given. To live up to that verse means the new birth enunciated in the *New Testament* or *Brahma Samarpana* (dedication to God) as taught in Hinduism. The verse, therefore, seems to me to mean only one thing: Recognize that everything you fancy you have is God's and from God, and take only what you really need for life. In other words, in the language of the *Gita*, it teaches the doctrine of uttermost detachment. Then only is life worth living.[2]

The detachment prescribed by the *Gita* is the hardest thing to achieve, and yet it is so absolutely necessary for perfect peace and for the vision of both the Little Self and the Greatest Self.[3]

CHAPTER XVIII

THE LAW OF SERVICE

THE *Bhagavad Gita* provides you with a Code of Conduct. Whenever you are in trouble, doubt, depression or despair, you will turn to the Code and the Compendium. And what can be a better inspiration for you than Chapter Third? It lays down that God created man, and at the same time imposed on him the duty of *Yajna* or sacrifice. Both these words are derived from roots meaning that which purifies, and the Lord also said that 'by sacrifice shall you propagate your kind.' Sacrifice thus means service, and the *Gita* says that he who works only for himself is a thief. 'Sacrifice ye for the gods, and pleased they will give you the reward of your sacrifice,' says the *Gita*. To proceed a little further, sacrifice means laying down one's life so that others may live. Let us suffer so that others may be happy, and the highest service and the highest love is wherein man lays down his life for his fellow-men. That highest love is thus *Ahimsa* which is the highest service. There is an eternal struggle between life and death, but the sum total of life and death does not mean extinction but life. For, life persists in spite of death. We have an ocular demonstration, positive proof of the unquestioned sovereignty of *Ahimsa*, and this triumph of *Ahimsa* is possible through sacrifice. There is thus no higher law than the Law of *Yajna*, the Law of Service.[1]

Yajna or Sacrifice

YAJNA means an act directed to the welfare of others, done without desiring any return for it, whether of a temporal or spiritual nature. 'Act' here must be taken in its widest sense, and includes thought and word, as well as deed. 'Others' embraces not only humanity, but all life. Therefore, and also from the standpoint of *Ahimsa,* it is not a *Yajna* to sacrifice lower animals even with a view to the service of humanity. It does not matter, that animal sacrifice is alleged to find a place in the *Vedas.* It is enough for us, that such sacrifice cannot stand the fundamental tests of Truth and Non-violence. I readily admit my incompetence in *Vedic* scholarship. But the incompetence, so far as this subject is concerned, does not worry me, because even if the practice of animal sacrifice be proved to have been a feature of *Vedic* society, it can form no precedent for votary of *Ahimsa.*

Again a primary sacrifice must be an act, which conduces the most to the welfare of the greatest number in the widest area, and which can be performed by the largest number of men and women with the least trouble. It will not, therefore, be a *Yajna,* much less a *Mahayajna,* to wish or to do ill to anyone else, even in order to serve a so-called higher interest. And the *Gita* teaches, and experience testifies, that all action that cannot come under the category of *Yajna* promotes bondage.

The world cannot subsist for a single moment without *Yajna* in this sense, and, therefore, the *Gita,* after having dealt with true wisdom in the Second Chapter, takes up in the Third the means of attaining it, and declares in so many words, that *Yajna* came with the Creation itself. This body, therefore, has been given us only in order that we may serve all Creation with it. And, therefore, says the *Gita,* 'he who eats without offering *Yajna* eats stolen food.' Every single act of one who would lead a life of purity should be in the nature of *Yajna*. *Yajna* having come to us with our birth, we are debtors all our lives, and thus for ever bound to serve the universe. And even as a bond-slave receives food, clothing and so on from the master whom he serves, so should we gratefully accept such gifts as may be assigned to us by the Lord of the Universe. What we receive must be called a gift; for as debtors we are entitled to no consideration for the discharge of our obligations. Therefore, we may not blame the Master if we fail to get it. Our body is His to be cherished, or cast away according to His will. This is not a matter for complaint or even pity; on the contrary, it is a natural and even a pleasant and desirable state, if only we realize our proper place in God's scheme. We do indeed need strong faith, if we would experience this supreme bliss. "Do not worry in the least about yourself, leave all worry to God,"—this appears to be the commandment in all religions.*

This need not frighten anyone. He who devotes himself to service with a clear conscience, will day by day grasp the necessity for it in greater measure, and will continually grow richer in faith. The path of service can hardly be trodden by one who is not prepared to renounce self-interest, and to recognize the conditions of his birth. Consciously or unconsciously, every one of us does render some service or other. If we cultivate the habit of doing this service deliberately, our desire for service will steadily grow stronger, and will make not only for our own happiness but that of the world at large.[2]

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*"So long as we believe that all is from God, we should have no cause for perturbation. The only condition is that whatever we do, we should do with God as witness. It is He who makes the world go and we only reap the consequences of our actions. Therefore, ours is only to obey His laws and then be indifferent as to the result."

—*Harijan*: June 23, 1946.

More About Yajna

IT will, perhaps, be worthwhile further to consider a principle which has been created along with mankind. *Yajna* is duty to be performed, or service to be rendered, all the twenty-four hours of the day.

To serve without desire is to favour not others, but ourselves, even as in discharging a debt we serve only ourselves, lighten our burden and fulfil our duty. Again, not only the good but all of us are bound to place our resources at the disposal of humanity. And if such is the law, as evidently it is, indulgence ceases to hold a place in life and gives way to renunciation. The duty of renunciation differentiates mankind from the beast.*

Some object, that life thus understood becomes dull and devoid of art, and leaves no room for the household. But renunciation here does not mean abandoning the world and retiring into the forest. The spirit of renunciation should rule all the activities of life. A householder does not cease to be one, if he regards life as a duty rather than as an indulgence. A merchant, who operates in the sacrificial spirit, will have crores passing through his hands, but he will, if he follows the law, use his abilities for service. He will, therefore, not cheat or speculate, will lead a simple life, will not injure a living soul and will lose millions rather than harm anybody. Let no one run away with the idea that this type of merchant exists only in my imagination. Fortunately for the world, it does exist in the West as well as in the East. It is true, such merchants may be counted on one's fingers' ends, but the type ceases to be imaginary, as soon as even one living specimen can be found to answer to it.

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*"The human body is meant solely for service, never for indulgence. The secret of happy life lies in renunciation. Renunciation is life. Indulgence spells death."

—*Harijan*: Feb. 24, 1946.

A life of sacrifice is the pinnacle of art, and is full of true joy. *Yajna* is not *Yajna* if one feels it to be burdensome or annoying.*

Self-indulgence leads to destruction, and renunciation to immortality. Joy has no independent existence. It depends upon our attitude to life. One man will enjoy theatrical scenery, another the ever new scenes which unfold themselves in the sky. Joy, therefore, is a matter of individual and national education. We shall delight in things which we have been taught to delight in as children. And illustrations can be easily cited of different national tastes.

One who would serve will not waste a thought upon his own comforts, which he leaves to be attended to or neglected by his Master on high. He will not, therefore, encumber himself with everything that comes his way; he will take only what he strictly needs and leave the rest. He will be calm, free from anger and unruffled in mind even if he finds himself inconvenienced. His service, like virtue, is its own reward, and he will rest content with it.

Again, one dare not be negligent in service, or be behind-hand with it. He, who thinks that he must be diligent only in his personal business, and unpaid public business may be done in any way and at any time he chooses, has still to learn the very rudiments of the science of sacrifice. Voluntary service of others demands the best of which one is capable, and must take precedence over service of self. In fact, the pure devotee consecrates himself to the service of humanity without any reservation whatever.[3]

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*"No sacrifice is worth the name unless it is a joy. Sacrifice and a long face go ill together."

—*Young India*: June 25, 1925.

One who works according to one's full capacity does all that can be expected of one. But in our work we should develop the *Gita* attitude which we desire to possess. That attitude is that whatever we do, we do selflessly in a spirit of service. Spirit of service means in a spirit of dedication to God. One who does so, loses all idea of self. He has no hatred for anybody. On the contrary, he is generous to others. Even in regard to the smallest piece of service you render, ask yourselves from time to time whether you exhibit all these qualities.[4]

Learn to be generous towards each other. To be generous means having no hatred for those whom we consider to be at fault, and loving and serving them. It is not generosity or love, if we have goodwill for others only as long as they and we are united in thought and action. That should be called merely friendship or mutual affection. The application of the term 'love' is wrong in such cases. 'Love' means feeling friendship for the enemy.[5]

Those who sing the *Gita* verses about being steady in wisdom must form the habit of working quietly.[6]

Work which spontaneously comes to one's lot, or action without attachment, in the words of the *Gita*, is the duty of the seeker after *Moksha*. Confine your energy to work that comes your way, never seek fresh fields of activity.[7]

I am a worshipper of the *Gita* and the *Gita* says that it is best at all times to do one's duty in one's own field, no matter how big any work outside that field may seemingly appear.[8]

One should not, without peremptory cause, abandon his present duty, however humble it may be, in favour of one which may appear to be higher. To adopt the Salvation Army's language. we are all soldiers of God to fight the battle of right against wrong, by means which are strictly non-violent and truthful. As His soldiers, ours is "not to reason why", ours is "but to do and die."[9]

A man who does the work that falls to his lot by the force of circumstances, can remain unattached to it. He does not get false attachment for such work. Real knowledge and true education can be had by devoted performance of one's duty.[10]

We may read the *Gita*, or the *Ramayana* or the *Hind Swaraj*. But what we have to learn from them is desire for the welfare of others. We have to teach this to our children also.[11]

Karmayoga

IF a labourer does all his work dedicating it to God, then thereby he can attain self-realization. Self-realization means purity of self.* Strictly speaking, only those who do bodily labour get self-realization; because 'God is the strength of the weak'. By 'weak' is not meant 'weak in body', though for them also their strength is God—but we should take it to mean weak in means and materials.

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*"The *Gita* tells us that by sincerely meditating on Him in one's heart, one can attain *Moksha*. Meditation is waiting on God. Waiting on God means increasing purity."

—*Young India*: Jan. 22, 1925.

The labourer must cultivate humility, for mere developing of intelligence may lead to the development of a devilish kind of intelligence. By doing merely intellectual work, we develop devilish tendencies. It is, therefore, that *Gita* says that one who eats without labour, eats stolen food. Humility is inherent in labour. And that is why it is *Karmayoga*, or activity that leads to Salvation. Doing physical work simply for getting money is no *Karmayoga*, since the idea is simply to earn money. Cleaning of latrines for earning money is no *Yajna* (sacrifice). But the same act, if done by way of service, for the sake of sanitation and for the good of others, becomes *Yajna*. One who does bodily labour out of spirit of service, in all humility and for self-realization, gets self-realization. Such a one should never feel reluctant to work. He should ever be tireless.[12]

CHAPTER XIX

THE GITA AND BREAD LABOUR

BRAHMA created his people with the duty of sacrifice laid upon them and said: 'By this do you flourish. Let it be the fulfiller of all your desires'. . . . He who eats without performing this sacrifice eats stolen bread," —thus says the *Gita*. "Earn thy bread by the sweat of thy brow," says the *Bible*. Sacrifices may be of many kinds. One of them may well be bread labour. If all laboured for their bread and no more, then there would be enough food and enough leisure for all. Then, there would be no cry of over-population, no disease, and no such misery as we see around. Such labour will be the highest form of sacrifice. Men will no doubt do many other things either through their bodies or through their minds, but all this will be labour of love, for the common good. There will then be no rich and no poor, none high and none low, no touchable and no untouchable.

This may be an unattainable ideal. But we need not, therefore, cease to strive for it. Even if without fulfilling the whole Law of Sacrifice, that is, the Law of Our Being, we performed physical labour enough for our daily bread, we should go a long way towards the ideal.[1]

The *Gita* teaches that one should perform *Yajna* (bread labour) and partake of the fruits of that labour. Millionaires who eat without work are parasites. Even they should eat by the sweat of their brow or should go without food.[2]

Auspicious Symbol

THE spinning-wheel is the auspicious symbol of *Sharir Yajna*—body labour. He who eats his food without offering this sacrifice, steals it. By giving up this sacrifice, we became traitors to the country and banged the door in the face of the Goddess of Fortune. The numerous men and women in India, whose bodies are mere skeletons, bear witness of this.[3]

To-day, God resides in the spinning-wheel. The fire of starvation is raging all around. I do not see any other help against it except through the spinning-wheel. God always reveals Himself to us in some concrete shape. Therefore, we sing about Draupadi that for her God took the form of garments.* Anyone who desires to see God to-day may see Him in the form of the spinning-wheel.[4]

Do not forget that spinning is *Yajna* (sacrifice). The *Gita* says that he who eats food without offering *Yajna*, eats stolen food. *Yajna* means work done for the good of others. For us, spinning is such public work.[5]

The reader will be interested in knowing that my belief is derived largly from the *Bhagavad Gita.* I give below Edwin Arnold's rendering of the verses from his *Song Celestial* for the benefit of those who do not read Sanskrit. In these verses is contained for me the whole truth of the spinning-wheel as an indispensable sacrament for the India of to-day. If we will take care of to-day, God will take care of the morrow.

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*"The story goes that Draupadi, a woman of great purity, was sought to be dishonoured by her opponents who tried to remove her clothes in the presence of all those assembled. But God protected her in her extreme distress, so that as the garments were removed they became endless and could not be unwound from her.

"Work is more excellent than idleness;
The body's life proceeds not, lacking work.
There is a task of holiness to do,
Unlike world-binding toil, which bindeth not
The faithful soul; such earthly duty do
Free from desire and thou shalt well perform
Thy heavenly purpose, Spake Prajapati
In the beginning, when all men were made,
And, with mankind, the sacrifice—"Do this!
Work! Sacrifice! Increase and multiply
With sacrifice! This shall be Kamadhuk,
Your 'Cow of Plenty', giving back her milk
Of all abundance. Worship the gods thereby;
The gods shall yield ye grace. Those meats ye crave
The gods will grant to Labour, when it pays
Tithes in the altar-flame. But if one eats
Fruits of the earth, rendering to kindly heaven
No gift of toil, that thief steals from his world.
Who eat of food after their sacrifice
Are quit of fault, but they that spread a feast
All for themselves, eat sin and drink of sin.
By food the living live; food comes of rain,
And rain comes by the pious sacrifice,
And sacrifice is paid with tithes of toil;
Thus action is of BRAHMA, *who is one,*
The only, All-pervading; at all times
Present in sacrifice. He that abstains
To help the rolling wheels of this great world,
Glutting his idle sense, lives a lost life,
Shameful and vain.

Work here undoubtedly refers to physical labour, and work by way of sacrifice can only be work to be done by all for the common benefit. Such work—such sacrifice can only be spinning. I do not wish to suggest that the author of Divine Song had the spinning-wheel in mind. He merely laid down a fundamental principle of conduct. And reading in and applying it to India, I can only think of spinning as the fittest and most acceptable sacrificial body labour. I cannot imagine anything nobler or more national than that, for say one hour in the day, we should all do the labour that the poor must do, and thus identify ourselves with them and through them with all mankind. I cannot imagine better worship of God than that in His name I should labour for the poor even as they do. The spinning-wheel spells a more equitable distribution of the riches of the earth.[6]

Message of the Wheel

I AM not tired of preaching the message of the Wheel on all occasions at all hours, because it is such an innocent thing, and yet so potent of good. It may not be relishing, but no health-giving good has the relish of spicy foods so detrimental to health. And so the *Gita*, in a memorable text, asks all thinking people to take things of which the first taste is bitter, but which are ultimately conducive to immortality. Such a thing to-day is the spinning-wheel and its product. There is no *Yajna* (sacrifice) greater than spinning, calculated to bring peace to the troubled spirit, to soothe the distracted student's mind, to spiritualize his life. I have to-day no better prescription for the country—not even the *Gayatri*—in this practical age which looks for immediate results. *Gayatri* I would fain offer, but I cannot promise immediate result, whilst the thing I offer is such as you can take to, with God's name on your lips, and expect immediate result. An English friend wrote saying his English commonsense told him that spinning was an excellent hobby. I said to him: 'It may be a hobby for you, for us it is the Tree of Plenty.'[7]

I ask you to render just a slight return to the poor by doing a little *Yajna* for them. For, he who eats without doing his *Yajna* steals his food, says the *Gita*. The *Yajna* that was required of the British civic population during the War was for each household to grow potatoes in its yard and for each household to do a little simple sewing. The *Yajna* of our age and for us is the spinning wheel.[8]

It is only when a man or woman has done bodily labour for the sake of service, that he or she gets any right to live. The *Gita* says that anybody who eats without performing *Yajna*, in Tolstoy's language 'bread-labour', is a thief, 'eats sin'. But body-labour becomes *Yajna* only when it is undertaken in a spirit of service not of indulgence, as it may easily become when it is done only to develop the animal in man. A man who adopts service as his ideal will go on curbing his carnal appetites more and more, and though, as in the case of Tolstoy, the attainment of full self-restraint seems always as far away as ever, he will never cease to persevere in it and regard such perseverance as the *summum bonum* of life. Firhad, in his quest of Shirin, wore away his life in breaking rocks, shall we do less for our Shirin of Truth, without which service is not?[9]

The Golden Rule

EVERY man and woman must work in order to live.

This principle came home to me upon reading one of Tolstoy's essays. Referring to the Russian writer Bondaref, Tolstoy observes that his discovery of the vital importance of bread labour is one of the most remarkable discoveries of modern times. The idea is that every healthy individual must labour enough for his food, and his intellectual faculties must be exercised not in order to obtain a living or amass a fortune, but only in the service of mankind. If this principle is observed everywhere, all men would be equal, none would starve and the world would be saved from many a sin.

It is possible that this golden rule will never be observed by the whole world. Millions observe it in spite of themselves without understanding it. But their mind is working in a contrary direction, so that they are unhappy themselves and their labour is not as fruitful as it should be. This state of things serves as an incentive to those who understand and seek to practise the rule. By rendering a willing obedience to it, they enjoy good health as well as perfect peace and develop their capacity for service.

In my opinion, the same principle has been set forth in the Third Chapter of the *Gita*. I do not go so far as to say that the word *Yajna* (sacrifice) there means body-labour. But when the *Gita* says that 'rain comes from sacrifice (Verse 14), I think it indicates the necessity of bodily labour. The 'residue of sacrifice' (Verse 13) is the bread that we have won in the sweat of our brow. Labouring enough for one's food has been classed in the *Gita* as a *Yajna*. Whoever eats more than is enough for sustaining the body is a thief, for most of us hardly perform labour enough to maintain themselves. I believe that a man has no right to receive anything more than his keep and that everyone who labours is entitled to a living wage.

This does not rule out the division of labour. The manufacture of everything needed to satisfy essential human wants involves bodily labour, so that labour in all essential occupations counts as bread labour. But as many of us do not perform such labour, they have to take exercise in order to preserve their health. A cultivator working on his farm from day to day has not to take breathing exercise or stretch his muscles. Indeed, if he observes the other laws of health, he will never be afflicted with illness.

God never creates more than what is strictly needed for the moment, with the result that if anyone appropriates more than he really needs, he reduces his neighbour to destitution. The starvation of people in several parts of the world is due to many of us seizing very much more than they need. We may utilize the gifts of Nature just as we choose, but in her books the debits are always equal to the credits. There is no balance in either column.[10]

The religious principle requires that the debit and credit sides of one's balance-sheet should be perfectly square. That is also the truest economics and, therefore, true religion. Whenever there is any discrepancy between these two, it spells bad economics and makes for unrighteousness. That is why the illustrious author of the *Gita* has defined *Yoga* as 'balance' or 'evenness'.[11]

Necessity of Bodily Labour

"BY food the living live; food comes of rain.

And rain comes by the pious sacrifice,
And sacrifice is paid with tithes of toil."

—EDWIN ARNOLD

Here there is not only the theory, in my opinion, of bodily labour propounded, but there is also the theory established of labour not only for oneself but for others, when and when only it becomes *Yajna* or sacrifice. The rains come not through intellectual feats, but through sheer bodily labour. It is a well-established scientific fact that where forests are denuded of trees, rains cease; where trees are planted, rains are attracted and the volume of water received increases with the increase of vegetation. Laws of Nature are still unexplored. We have but scratched the surface. Who knows all the ill effects, moral and physical, of the cessation of bodily labour? Let me not be misunderstood. I do not discount the value of intellectual labour, but no amount of it is any compensation for bodily labour, which every one of us is born to give for the common good of all. It may be, often is, infinitely superior to bodily labour, but it never is or can be a substitute for it, even as intellectual food, though far superior to the grains we eat, never can be a substitute for them. Indeed, without the products of the earth, those of the intellect would be an impossibility.[12]

May not men earn their bread by intellectual labour? No. The needs of the body must be supplied by the body. "Render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's", perhaps applies here as well. Mere mental, that is intellectual, labour is for the soul and is its own satisfaction. It should never demand payment. In the ideal state, doctors, lawyers and the like will work solely for the benefit of society, not for self. Obedience to the Law of Bread Labour will bring about a silent revolution in the structure of society. Man's triumph will consist in substituting the struggle for existence by the struggle for mutual service. The Law of the Brute will be replaced by the Law of Man.[13]

Intellectual work is important and has an undoubted place in the scheme of life. But what I insist on is the necessity of physical labour. No man, I claim, ought to be free from that obligation; it will serve to improve even the quality of his intellectual output. I venture to say that, in ancient times, *Brahmins* worked with their body as with their mind. But even if they did not, body-labour is a proved necessity at the present time. In this connection, I would refer to the life of Tolstoy and how he made famous the theory of Bread Labour first propounded in his country by the Russian peasant Bondaref.[14]

Sacrifice and Service

GANDHIJI: The world is sustained by sacrifice and service. As the *Gita* says: 'the Lord created the beings with the duty of sacrifice cast on them.'

Bhansali: I know. But are not meditation and worship, too, a sacred duty?

Gandhiji: Meditation and worship are not exclusive things like jewels to be kept locked up in a strong-box. They must be seen in every act of ours.... What I cannot understand is that you should ignore a vital condition of our very existence, I mean the principle of sacrifice with which we are born.

Bhansali: I should like you to make this a little clearer.

Gandhiji: You know that the *Gita* says that he who eats without offering the daily sacrifice, steals his food. To beg one's food is a good thing, but only after one has offered one's sacrifice.

Bhansali: I have heard it. I was pondering the whole day over what you said the other day. I wondered if I had any right to eat my flour and *neem* leaves, as I did no work.

Gandhiji: Yes, you have heard it. But the world accepts the principle and acts up to it, *e.g.*, Jain *Munis* and *Sannyasis.* They live on alms, but they do so because they persuade themselves that they are offering sufficient sacrifice in the shape of the teaching they impart. Here they are somewhat mistaken, as I think. It is their duty to impart spiritual teaching, but all the same they must offer some sacrifice in the shape of bread-labour, and rather than expect their food as a reward of their sacrifice, they should, like true *Brahmins,* live on the charity of the people. All, therefore, that I have to tell you again and again is that you must shake yourself of this illusion. To do no work is no renunciation. It is inertia. What I have written has universal experience in support of it, and my own life is an eloquent witness to it. You interrupted your wanderings and came here out of love for me. God sent you here. How best am I to requite your love? Not by treating you to good food. You would not care to have it, I would not care to give it. But I must pour out to you what that purest love bids the heart to do.[15]

Gita and the Law of Swadeshi

THE Law of *Swadeshi* is ingrained in the basic natrue of man, but it has to-day sunk into oblivion. Hence, the necessity for the vow of *Swadeshi.* In its ultimate and spiritual sense, *Swadeshi* stands for the final emancipation of the human soul from its earthly bondage. For, this earthly tabernacle is not its natural or permanent abode, it is a hindrance in its onward journey, it stands in the way of its realizing its oneness with other lives. A votary of *Swadeshi,* therefore, in his striving to identify himself with the entire creation seeks to be emancipated from the bondage of the physical body.

If this interpretation of *Swadeshi* be correct, then it follows that its votary will, as a first duty, dedicate himself to the service of his immediate neighbours. This involves exclusion or even sacrifice of the interests of the rest, but the exclusion or the sacrifice would be apparent only. Pure service of one's neighbours can never from its very nature result in disservice to those who are remotely situated, rather the contrary. 'As with the individual, so with the Universe' is an unfailing principle which we would do well to lay to heart. On the other hand, a man who allows himself to be lured by 'the distant scene' and runs to the ends of the earth for service, is not only foiled in his ambition but fails in his duty towards his neighbours also. Take a concrete instance. In the particular place where I live, I have certain persons as my neighbours, some relations and dependents. Naturally, they all feel, as they have a right to, that they have a claim on me and look to me for help and support. Suppose now, I leave them all at once and set out to serve people in a distant place. My decision would throw my little world of neighbours and dependants out of gear, while my gratuitous knight-errantry would more likely than not disturb the atmosphere in the new place. Thus, a culpable neglect of my immediate neighbours and an unintended disservice to the people whom I wish to serve would be the first fruits of my violation of the principles of *Swadeshi*.

It is not difficult to multiply such instances. That is why the *Gita* says: "It is better to die performing one's duty or *Swadharma*, but *Paradharma*, or another's duty, is fraught with danger."* Interpreted in terms of one's physical environment, this gives us the Law of *Swadeshi*. What the *Gita* says with regard to *Swadharma* equally applies to *Swadeshi* also, for *Swadeshi* is *Swadharma* applied to one's immediate environment

It is only when the doctrine of *Swadeshi* is wrongly understood that mischief results, *e.g.*, it would be a travesty of the doctrine of *Swadeshi*, if to coddle my family I set about grabbing money by all means fair or foul. The Law of *Swadeshi* requires me no more than to discharge my legitimate obligations towards my family by just means, and the attempt to do so will reveal to me the Universal Code of Conduct. The practice of *Swadeshi* can never do harm to anyone and, if it does, it is not *Swadharma* but egotism that moves me.[1c]

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*"Has not the singer of the *Gita* said: 'Better by far is the performance of one's own *Dharma* (duty), however humble it may be, than another's however loftier it may be'?"

—*Young India*: July 23, 1925.

CHAPTER XX

COMMUNINGS ON SOME GITA CHAPTERS

Chapter Nine

CHAPTER Nine contains what I would describe as the healing balm for us afflicted morals—afflicted not only with physical ills, but with ills of the spirit. The Chapter contains the promise of God to all erring mortals, nay even to those who may be 'born from the very womb of Sin'. Those that turn to Him shall have no cause to grieve. The Chapter also shows that the *Gita* was written when *Varnashrama* had ceased to exist in its pristine purity and had come to mean, as it does to-day, a classification of high and low. Let us forget that, and remember that the promise is given to all— अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो —even if they be steeped in sin. And when we are all steeped in sin, more or less, who dare cast the stone at whom? 'Be thou certain none can perish, trusting Me': says the Lord; but let it not be understood to mean that our sins will be washed away by merely trusting Him without any striving. Only he who struggles hard against the allurements of sense-objects, and turns in tears and grief to the Lord, will be comforted.

Chapters Eleven and Twelve

AGAIN, Chapters Eleven and Twelve: What can more forcefully turn one to God than this panoramic vision of His multitudinous manifestations? And having thus prepared us for *Bhakti*, the Lord gives us the essence of *Bhakti* in the Twelfth Chapter which is so brief that any one can commit it to memory, to call it to his aid in moments of trial.

Chapters Fourteen and Fifteen

CHAPTER Fourteen and the threefold division of the qualities of nature remind me of Henry Drummond's book I read about 30 years ago—*The Natural Law in the Spiritual World.* The laws are numerous, but they have been broadly classified under three heads. The Fourteenth Chapter describes the laws to which man is subject and the Fifteenth describes *Purushottama*—the Perfect Man. The 'ascent of man' is what we have to learn from these Chapters. There is no man who is governed exclusively by one of the three *Gunas—Sattva, Rajas* or *Tamas.* We have each of us to rise to a state in which we are governed predominantly by the *Sattva* principle, until at last we rise beyond the three and are 'Perfect Men.' I can think of an illustration from the physical world. Take water, which in its solid state remains on the earth; it cannot ascend until it is rarefied into steam. But once it is rarefied into steam, it rises up in the sky where at last it is transformed into clouds, which drop down in the form of rain and fructify and bless the earth. We are all like water, we have to strive so to rarefy ourselves that all the ego in us perishes and we merge in the Infinite to the eternal good of all.[1]

The Eleventh Chapter

> "THERE is not only great poetry in the Eleventh Chapter of the *Gita* as you have made out, but also the vital truth that God is immanent in all created objects which are only different parts of His body."

You are right, but that makes no difference as regards my introduction to that Chapter. One who looks upon the universe as various facets of God will certainly have the beatific vision. But what he sees will be a creation of his own imagination. A Christian who looks upon the universe as God, will see a Christ-like image. A man sees God as he worships Him. A Hindu will always draw fresh inspiration from the Eleventh Chapter, and if he is a devotee *(Bhakta)*, he will see God as He has been there described. But what he sees will have no existence except in his own imagination. God is without form, but He assumes form for His devotee. That is His *Maya*, or poetry. The whole thing boils down to this: We have to see God even in the thief and the robber. If we can thus see God in him, he will give up his thievish propensities. All our knowledge and spiritual exercises are fruitless so long as we have not had this vision.[2]

CHAPTER XXI

THE GITA DISCOURSES

NOW I wish to discuss, as I understand it, the book which we complete every fortnight, reciting it chapter by chapter each day, upon which we meditate, and of which we have made for ourselves a spiritual light-house.

If we try to understand from all possible points of view, and continuously meditate on this book, which we wish to make use of at every turn, and with the help of which we wish to unravel the complexities of our minds, we must become one with it. As for myself, I run to my *Mother Gita* whenever I find myself in difficulties, and upto now she has never failed to comfort me. It is possible that those, who are getting comfort from the *Gita*, may get greater help, and see something altogether new, if they come to know the way, in which I understand it from day to day.[1]

The *Gita* is a small portion of the *Mahabharata*. The *Mahabharata* is considered to be an historical work but, for us, both the *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* are not historical works, but religious works, or rather, if we call them histories, they are the histories of the soul. And it is not the description of what happened thousands of years ago, but it is the picture of what is going on in every human breast to-day. In both the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, there is the description of the battle that is daily going on between the Gods and the Demons—between Rama and Ravana. The dialogue in the *Gita* between Shri Krishna and Arjuna is one such description. That dialogue is recited by Sanjaya before the blind Dhritarashtra.

Gita means "sung". Here the word *Upanishad* is understood, so the complete meaning is, an "*Upanishad* that is sung". *Upanishad* means knowledge—instruction. Thus the *Gita* means the teachings of Shri Krishna to Arjuna.

We should read the *Gita* with the realization that the Inward Seer, Lord Krishna, is ever present in our breasts, and that, whenever we, becoming as Arjuna in his desire for knowledge, turn to Him, He is ever ready to shelter us. We are asleep, the Inward Seer is always awake. He is awaiting the wakening of desire for knowledge in us. We do not know how to ask. We are not even inclined to ask. Therefore, we daily contemplate a book like the *Gita*. We wish to create in ourselves a desire for religious knowledge—a desire to learn spiritual enquiry, while meditating on it. Whenever under stress, we hasten to the *Gita* for relief and obtain consolation. It is at once for us a Teacher—a Mother. And we must have faith that with our head in her lap, we shall always remain safe. The *Gita* shall unravel all our spiritual tangles. Those who will meditate on the *Gita* in this way, will derive fresh joy and new meanings from it every day. There is not a single spiritual tangle which the *Gita* cannot unravel. It is a different thing, if, on account of our insufficient faith, we do not know how to read and understand it. We daily recite the *Gita* in order that our faith may continually increase and that we may be ever wakeful. I am giving here the substance of what meanings I have obtained, and am still obtaining, from such meditations of the *Gita*, for the help of the inmates of the *Ashram*.[2]

Chapter I

WHEN the Pandavas and the Kauravas gathered together on the battle-field of *Kurukshetra* (the field of *Kuru*) with their armies, Duryodhana, the king of the Kauravas, approached Drona (his teacher in the science of war) and named the leading warriors on either side. As a signal for the battle to begin, conchshell horns were sounded on both the sides and Shri Krishna, who was Arjuna's charioteer, drove his chariot into a place between the two armies. The scene which greeted Arjuna's eyes unnerved him, and he said to Shri Krishna : 'How can I attack these in battle? I might fight readily enough if I had to fight with strangers, but these are my kinsmen. The Kauravas and the Pandavas are first cousins. We were brought up together. Drona is our teacher as well as the Kauravas'. Bhishma is a revered elder for both. How can I fight with him? It is true that the Kauravas are criminals and doers of evil deeds. They have wronged the Pandavas and deprived them of their lands. They have insulted the saintly Draupadi. But what shall I gain by killing them? They are fools, indeed. But shall I also be equally foolish? I have some little knowledge. I can discriminate between right and wrong. I thus see that it is a sin to fight with relatives. Never mind if they have taken wrongful possession of the Pandavas' share in the kingdom. Never mind even if they kill us. But how dare we raise our hand against them? 'O Krishna, I will not fight with my kith and kin.'

With these words, Arjuna sank down on the seat of the chariot, being overwhelmed by grief.

Here ends the first Chapter which is entitled 'the sorrow of Arjuna'. All of us should feel pain even as Arjuna did. No acquisition of knowledge is possible unless there is in us a sense of something lacking and a desire to know the truth. If a man is not curious even to know what is wrong and what is right, what is the use of religion for him? The battle-field of *Kurukshetra* only provides the occasion for the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna. The real *Kurukshetra* is the human heart, which is also a *Dharmakshetra* (the field of righteousness) if we look upon it as the abode of God and invite Him to take hold of it. Some battle or other is fought on this battle-field from day to day. Most of these battles arise from the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine', between kinsmen and strangers. Therefore, as we shall find later on, the Lord tells Arjuna that attraction (*Raga*) and repulsion (*Dvesha*) lie at the root of sin. When I look upon a person or thing as 'mine', *Raga* takes hold of my mind; and when I look upon him as a stranger, aversion or hatred enters the mind. Therefore, we must forget the distinction between 'mine' and 'thine'. That is to say, we must give up our likes and dislikes. This is the teaching of the *Gita* and all other scriptures. To say this is one thing; to practise it is quite another. The *Gita* is there to teach us how to practise it. We will try to understand the method it recommends.

Chapter II

WHEN Arjuna had picked himself a little bit, the Lord rebuked him and said: 'How is it that this delusion has come to you? It is unworthy of a warrior like you. But even then Arjuna stuck to his first position, refused to fight and said: 'If in order to get it, I have to slay elders and other relations, I do not want not only a kingdom on this earth but even the delights of paradise. My mind gropes in darkness. I do not know where my duty lies. I put myself into your hands. Please guide me.'

Finding that Arjuna was bewildered and aspired after knowledge, Krishna had pity on him and proceeded to explain things to him: 'Your sorrow is for nothing, and you utter words of wisdom without understanding. You have evidently forgotten the distinction between the body and the embodied soul. The soul never dies; but the body passes through childhood, youth and age and perishes in the end. The body is born, but the soul is birthless and unchanging. It ever was, is now and will be there for all time to come. For whom, then, do you grieve? Your grief arises from a delusion. You look upon these Kauravas as your own, but you are aware that their bodies will come to an end. And, as for the souls which inhabit these bodies, no one can destroy them. The soul cannot be wounded by weapons, burned by fire, dried by the wind or drowned in water. Then again, consider this from the standpoint of your duty as a warrior with an army under your command. If you refuse to fight this righteous war, the consequences will be very reverse of what you expect and you will become an object of ridicule. You have always enjoyed the reputation of being a brave man. But if now you withdraw from the battle, you will be supposed to have been driven from it by fear. If it were part of your duty to flee in the face of danger, disgrace would not matter; but if you retire from battle now, you will have failed to discharge your duty, and people will be justified in condemning your flight.

'Thus far, I have tried to reason out things, draw a distinction between the body and the soul and remind you of your duty as a warrior. But let me now explain

Karmayoga (the method of action). A practitioner of *Karmayoga* never comes to harm. It has nothing to do with chopping logic. It is something to be translated into action and experience. An ounce of practice is more profitable than tons of argumentation. And this practice, too, must not be vitiated by speculation about its fruit. Literalists perform *Vedic* rites directed to the acquisition of material rewards. If one rite does not yield the expected fruit, they have recourse to another, and being disappointed once more, they take up a third. And thus they suffer from utter mental confusion. As a mater of fact, it is up to us to do our duty without wasting a single thought on the fruits of our action. To fight is the duty you have to discharge at present. Gain or loss, defeat or victory, is not in your power. Why should you carry the needless burden of thinking about them and be like the dog who walks under a cart and imagines that it is being drawn by himself and not by the bullocks? Defeat and victory, heat and cold, pleasure and pain come to a man in turn and he must put up with them. Without worrying about the fruit of action, a man must devote himself to the performance of his duty with an evenness of temper. This is *Yoga*, or skill in action. The success of an act lies in performing it, and not in its result, whatever it is. Therefore, be calm and do your duty clear of consequences.'

On hearing all this, Arjuna said : 'The course of conduct you have mapped for me seems to be beyond my capacity. Not to worry about defeat or victory, not to waste a thought on the result,—how can one attain such an evenness of temper and steadfastness in spirit ? How does a man with such attainments behave, and how are we to recognize him ?'

The Lord replied: 'O King, one who renounces all the cravings which torment the heart and derives his contentment from within himself, is said to be a *Sthitaprajna* or *Samadhistha* (one stable in spirit). He is unruffled in adversity, and he does not hanker after happiness. Pleasure and pain are felt through the five senses. Therefore, this wise man draws his senses away from sense objects even as a tortoise draws in his limbs. The tortoise withdraws into his shell when he apprehends danger. But, in the case of human beings, sense objects are ready to attack the senses at all times; therefore, their senses must always be drawn in, and they should be ever ready to fight against sense objects. This is the real battle. Some people resort to self-mortification and fasting as weapons of defence against sense objects. These measures have their limited use. The senses do not make for sense objects so long as a man is fasting, but fasting alone does not destroy his relish for them. On the other hand, that relish may be heightened when the fast is broken, and a man can get rid of it only with the grace of God. The senses are so powerful that they drag a man behind them by force, if he is not on his guard. Therefore, a man must always keep them under control. This end he can achieve only if he turns his eyes inward, realizes God Who resides in his heart and is devoted to Him. One who thus looks upon Me as His goal and surrenders his all to Me, keeping his senses in control, is a *Yogi*—stable in spirit. On the other hand, if a man is not master of his senses, he is always musing on the objects of sense and conceives an attachment for them, so that he can hardly think of anything else. From this attachment arises desire; and when the desire is thwarted, he gets angry. Anger drives him nearly mad. He cannot understand what he is about. He thus loses his memory, behaves in a disorderly manner and comes to an ignoble end. When a man's senses rove at will, he is like a rudderless ship which is at the mercy of the gale and is broken to pieces on the rocks. Men should, therefore, abandon all desires and restrain their senses, so that these do not indulge in undesirable activity. The eyes, then, will look straight and that, too, only at holy objects; the ears will listen to hymns in praise of God or to cries of distress: hands and feet will be engaged in service. Indeed, all the organs of sense and of action will be employed in helping a man to do his duty and making him a fit recipient of the grace of God. And once the grace of God has descended upon him, all his sorrows are at an end. As snow melts in the sunshine, all pain vanishes when the grace of God shines upon him and he is said to be stable in spirit. But if a man is not stable-minded, how can he think good thoughts? Without good thoughts there is no peace, and without peace there is no happiness. Where a stable-minded man sees things clear as daylight, the unstable man, distracted by the turmoil of the world, is as good as blind. On the other hand, what is pure in the eyes of the worldly wise, looks unclean to and repels the stable-minded man. Rivers continuously flow into the sea, but the sea remains unmoved; in the same way all sense objects come to the *Yogi,* but he always remains calm like the sea. Thus one who abandons all desires, is free from pride and selfishness and behaves as one apart, finds peace. This is the condition of a perfect man of God, and he who is established therein, even at the final hour is saved (lit. set free, *mukta*).'

Chapter III

WHEN Krishna had thus set forth the marks of identification for a *Sthitaprajna* person, Arjuna received the impression that one had only to sit quiet in order to attain such a state, as Krishna had not made the slightest reference to any need for action on his part. He, therefore, asked Krishna : 'It seems as if you hold that knowledge is superior to action. If so, why are you urging me to this terrible deed and thus confusing my mind ? Please tell me clearly where my welfare lies.'

Krishna replied : 'O sinless Arjuna, since the beginning of time, seekers have taken one or the other of two different paths. In one of these, the pride of place is given to knowledge; and, in the other, it is given to action. But you will find that freedom from action cannot be attained without action, that wisdom never comes to a man simply on account of his having ceased to act. Man does not become perfect merely by renouncing everything. Don't you see that every one of us is doing something or other all the time? Our very nature impels us to action. Such being the Law of Nature, one who sits with folded hands, but lets his mind dwell on the objects of sense, is a fool and may even be called a hypocrite. Rather than indulge in such senseless inactivity, is it not better that a man should control the senses, overcome his likes and dislikes, and engage himself in some activity or other without fuss and in a spirit of detachment? Do your allotted duty, restraining the organs of sense, for that is better than inaction. An idler will only meet his end the sooner for his idleness. But while acting, remember that action leads to bondage unless it is performed in a spirit of sacrifice. Sacrifice (*Yajna*) means exerting oneself for the benefit of others, in a word, service. And where service is rendered for service's sake, there is no room for attachment, likes and dislikes. Perform such a sacrifice; render such service. When *Brahma* created the universe, He created sacrifice along with it, as it were, and said to mankind: "Go forth into the world; serve one another and prosper. Look upon all creatures as gods. Serve and propitiate those gods, so that, being pleased, they will be gracious to you and fulfil your wishes unasked." Therefore, understand that whoever enjoys the fruits of the earth, without serving the people and without having first given them their share, is a thief. And, he who enjoys them after having given all creatures their share, is entitled to such enjoyment and is thus freed from sin. On the other hand, those who labour only for themselves are sinners and eat the fruit of sin. It is a Law of Nature that creatures are sustained by food, food production depends on the rains, and the rains descend on the earth on account of *Yajna*, that is to say, the labour of all creatures. There is no rain where there are no creatures, and it does rain wherever they are. All live by labour, none can remain idle and live; and if this is true of the lower forms of life, it is still more applicable to man. Action takes its origin from *Brahma* and *Brahma* from the Imperishable *Brahma*; therefore, the Imperishable *Brahma* is present in all kinds of sacrifice or service. And whoever breaks this chain of mutual service is a sinner and he lives in vain.

'When a man enjoys peace of mind and contentment, it may be said that there is nothing left for him to do. He does not stand to gain by action or by inaction. He has no personal interests to serve; and yet he must not cease to offer sacrifice. Therefore, do your duty from day to day without entertaining likes and dislikes and in a spirit of detachment. He who acts in such a spirit enjoys the Beatific Vision. Then again, if even a selfless king like Janaka reached perfection all the while working for the good of the people, how can you behave in a way different from his? Whatever a good and great man does, common people imitate. Take My own case, for instance. I have nothing to gain by action, and yet ceaselessly do I pour myself in action. Hence it is that people, too, go on working more or less. But what would happen if I ceased to work? The world would callapse if the sun, the moon and the stars ceased to move. And it is I who set them in motion and regulate their activity. But there is a difference between My attitude and the attitude of the common man. I act in the spirit of perfect detachment, while he harbours attachment and works in his own interest. If a wise man like you ceased to act, others, too, would do the same and their minds would be unsettled. Therefore, do your duty without attachment, so that others might not cease to work and might gradually learn to work without attachment. Man is bound to work in obedience to, and in conformity with, his own nature. Only a fool thinks that he himself is the doer. To breathe is a part of man's nature; when an insect settles upon the eye, the eyelid moves of its own accord. And nobody says: "I take in the air", or "I move the eye-lid". In the same manner, why should not all human actions be performed in accordance with the qualities of nature? Why should there be any egoism about it? In order that a man may be able thus to act naturally and without attachment, the best thing for him to do is to dedicate all his actions to Me and perform them without egoism as a mere instrument in My hands. When a man thus gets over selfishness, all his actions are natural and free from taint and he escapes many a trouble. Actions, then, have no binding force for him. Action being natural, it is sheer egoism to outrage nature and to claim to be inactive. The victim of such egoism will externaly appear not to act, but his mind is always active in scheming. This is worse than external activity and has all the greater binding force.

'As a matter of fact, the senses feel attraction and aversion for their respective objects. For instance, the ears like to hear some things and do not like to hear other things. The nose likes to smell the rose, and does not like to smell dirt. This is also true of the other organs of sense. Therefore, what man has to do is not to submit to these two robbers, namely, attraction and repulsion. If one wishes to escape their attentions, he must not go about in search of action. He must not hanker after this to-day, that to-morrow and the other thing the day after. But he should hold himself ready to render for the sake of God such service as falls to his share. Thus, he will cultivate within himself the feeling that whatever he does is, in fact, an act of God and not his own, and his egoism will be a thing of the past. This is *Swadharma,* (one's own duty). One must stick to *Swadharma,* for it is the best for himself at any rate. *Paradharma* (another's duty) may appear to be better, but even so it should be looked upon as dangerous. *Moksha* (salvation) lies in embracing death while doing one's own duty.'

When Krishna said that action performed by one who is free from likes and dislikes is scarifice, Arjuna asked: 'What is it that makes a man commit sin? Very often it seems as if he were driven to sin by some outsider against his own will.'

Krishna replied: 'The slave drivers in this case are *Kama* (desire) and *Krodha* (anger). These are like blood brothers. If desire is not satisfied, anger is the inevitable consequence. One who is the slave of desire and anger is said to be inspired by *Rajoguna* (the quality of passion), which is man's greatest enemy and against which he has to fight day in, day out. As dust hides a mirror, smoke suffocates a fire, and the womb covers the embryo, even so anger deprives knowledge of its lustre and suffocates it. And desire is insatiable like fire, and taking possession of man's senses, mind and intellect, knocks him down. Therefore first control your senses, and then conquer the mind. When you have done this, the intellect also will obey your orders. For though among the senses, the mind and the intellect, the mind is greater than the senses and the intellect is greater than the mind, the soul is the greatest of all. Man has no idea of his own strength or soul force, and tends to believe that the senses, the mind and the intellect are not amenable to his control. But when once he has gained confidence in soul force, everything else becomes easy as a matter of course. And desire, anger and their countless hosts hold no terror for him who has mastered the senses, the mind and the intelligence.'

I call this chapter as the key to an understanding of the *Gita*, and the gist of it is that life is given us for service and not for enjoyment. We have, therefore, to impart a sacrificial character to our lives. Intellectual assent to this proposition is only the first step, but such assent and conduct in terms of that assent are bound to rid our heart of its impurities in course of time. But what is real service? In order to obtain the right answer to this question, restraint of the senses is essential, as it gives us a clearer and clearer vision of the God of Truth. Service, rendered with selfish motives, ceases to be sacrifice. Hence, the urgent need for the spirit of detachment. When this is understood, all manner of controversies lose their meaning for us. 'Did Krishna really ask Arjuna to kill his relatives? Could such killing ever be a part of one's duty?' Questions like these are set at rest for ever. When detachment governs our actions, even the weapon raised in order to strike an enemy falls down out of our hand. But a mere pretence of detachment serves no useful purpose. If only we persevere in our effort, detachment may come to us, perhaps the very first day, or may be only after a thousand years. We must not worry over the time this takes, for the effort carries within itself the seeds of success. We must, however, be on our guard and make sure that it is a genuine effort, and that there is no self-deception. And, this is certainly possible for us all.

Chapter IV

THE Lord says to Arjuna :

'The *Yoga* of selfless action which I commend to you is an ancient truth; I am not propounding any new doctrine. I have declared it to you, as you are my devoted friend, in order to heal the conflict in your mind. Whenever goodness weakens and evil grows from strength to strength, I incarnate Myself and protect the good and destroy the wicked. Those who are aware of this power (*Maya*) of Mine, are confident that evil is bound to go under. I am always by the good man's side. He never strays from the strait and narrow path and comes to Me at last, for he meditates on Me and hides himself in Me and thus is delivered from passion and anger and is purified by austerity and wisdom. As a man sows, so he reaps. None can escape from the operation of the laws I have made. I established the four *Varnas* (classes, not castes) by the different distribution of qualities and actions. However, I am not their author, for I do not desire the fruits of action and have nothing to do with the merit or demerit arising therefrom. This divine *Maya* (course of action) is worth knowing. All activities prevalent in the world are subject to divine laws, and yet God is not defiled by them. Therefore, He is and also is not their author. And a man who does likewise and acts in a spirit of detachment without being defiled by actions and by the yearning for their fruit, is sure to be saved. In action he sees inaction, and he understands at once what is wrong action. Wrong actions are all those that are inspired by desire and cannot be performed in the absence of desire, such, for instance, as theft, adultery and the like. These simply cannot be done in a spirit of detachment. Therefore, those who do the duty that lies nearest without desire and scheming for the fruit of action, may be said to have burnt up their actions in the fire of wisdom (*Jnana*). A man who has thus abandoned the attachment to the fruit of action, is always contented, always independent. He has his mind under control. He gives up all his possessions. And his activity is natural like the bodily functions of a healthy individual. He is free from any pride or even consciousness that he is acting on his own. He has the realization that he is a mere instrument of the Divine Will. What does it matter whether he meets with success or with failure? He is neither elated by the one, nor unnerved by the other. All his work is done as a sacrifice (*Yaina*), that is to say, as service to the world. He meditates upon God in all his actions and, in the end, comes to Him.

'There are many forms of sacrifice, the root of which lies in purity and service, such as, for instance, control of the senses, charity and *Pranayama* (breath control) practised with a view to self-purification. Knowledge of these can be acquired from a wise teacher (*Guru*) through humility, earnestness and service. If anybody indulges in various activities which he thinks are *Yajna*, without any understanding of what *Yajna* is, he will only do harm to himself and to the world. It is, therefore, necessary that all actions should be performed intelligently. This wisdom (*Jnana*) is not mere book learning. In it, there is no room for doubt. It begins with faith and ends in experience. It enables a man to see all beings in himself and to see himself in God, so that everything appears to him to be actually informed by God. Such wisdom effects the salvation of the worse of sinners. It releases the seeker from the bondage of action, so that he is not affected by its results. There is nothing else in the world so holy as this wisdom. Therefore, try to obtain it with a heart full of faith in God and with the senses under control, so that you will enjoy perfect peace of mind.'

The Third, the Fourth and the following Fifth Chapters should be read together, as they explain to us what the *Yoga* of selfless action (*Anasakti*) is and what are the means of practising it. If these three chapters are properly understood, the reader will have less difficulty in tackling what follows. The remaining chapters deal in detail with the ways and means of achieving *Anasakti*. We should study the *Gita* from this point of view, and if we pursue this study, we shall find without much trouble a solution of the problems which confront us from day to day. This calls for daily practice. Let everybody try it. If, for instance, he is angry, let him remember the verse dealing with anger and subdue that enemy. Supposing we heartily dislike somebody, or are impatient or gluttonous, or in doubt as to whether we should do or should not do something or other, all these difficulties can be solved with the help of *Mother Gita* if we have faith in it and give it constant study. Our daily recitation of the *Gita* as well as this series of letters is a means to this end.

Chapter V

ARJUNA said: 'You speak highly of wisdom, so that I am inclined to think that action is unnecessary. But then you also praise action, thus making me feel that unselfish performance of action is the thing to do. My mind will be at peace only if you tell me definitely which of the two is better.'

The Lord replied: '*Sannyasa* means wisdom and *Karmayoga* means selfless action. Both of them are good, but if I had to choose between the two, I should say that *Yoga* or selfless action is better. The man who does not hate anyone or anything, does not long for anything and is free from the pairs of opposites such as heat and cold, pleasure and pain, is a *Sannyasi* (wise man, lit. one who renounces the world), no matter whether he is or is not a performer of action. He easily casts off the chain that binds him. Only the ignorant speak of wisdom and action as different, not the learned. The fruit of both is the same; both lead to an identical goal. Therefore, he who sees them as one sees truly. The man of pure wisdom achieves his object by merely willing it, and has no need to perform an outward act. When the city of Mithila was on fire, others were bound to rush to it and fight the fire. But King Janaka contributed to this fight by his mental determination only, for his servants were ready to obey his commands. If he had run about with a water pot to quench the fire, he would only have done harm; others would have stared at him and failed to perform their own duty, or, at the most, would have rushed here and there with a view to the King's safety. But it is not given to every one of us to become a Janaka at once. It is indeed a very difficult task to reach a Janaka-like state. Only one in a million can reach it as the fruit of service extending over many lives, and it is not a bed of roses either. As a man goes on performing selfless action, his thought grows from strength to strength and he less and less resorts to external action. But he is hardly conscious of this change, and he has not this change in view either. He is devoted only to service, with the result that his power of rendering service increases to such an extent that he hardly seems to rest from service. And, finally, his service is limited to thought alone, just as an object in extraordinary motion seems to be at rest. It is obviously improper to say that such a man does nothing. But this lofty state can, as a rule, be only imagined, and not experienced. Hence, my preference for *Karmayoga*. Millions derive the fruit of *Sannyasa* (wisdom, lit. renunciation) from selfless action alone. They would fall between two stools if they tried their hand at *Sannyasa*. If they take to *Sannyasa*, it is very likely that they will become hypocrites, and as they have ceased to perform action, they are lost altogether. But a man who has purified himself by means of selfless action, who has his mind and his senses under control, and who has identified himself with all beings, loving them as himself—such a man stands apart from action although he is acting all the time, and is not bound by it. He talks, he walks, he takes part in normal human activity, but his activity seems to be merely a function of his organs of sense, and he himself seems to be doing nothing. The bodily functions of a physically healthy person are natural and spontaneous. His stomach, for instance, functions independently of him; he has not to bother about its functioning. Similarly, a spiritually healthy person, though acting through his body, is not tainted by it and may be said to be doing nothing. Therefore, a man should dedicate all his actions to *Brahma* (God) and perform them on His behalf, so that in spite of his activity, he does not earn either merit or demerit and is untouched by either like a lotus leaf which is untouched by water. Therefore, a Yogi (man of selfless action), performing action with the body, mind and understanding, in a spirit of detachment and without egotism, purifies himself and enters into peace. The *A-yogi,* on the other hand, being attached to the fruit of action, is a prisoner bound by his own desires. The *Yogi* lives blissfully in the city with nine gates that is his body, having renounced all actions by his mind, and realizes that he himself is not doing or getting done anything at all. The man with a purified soul does not commit sin, nor does he do any meritorious deed. He who acts in a spirit of detachment, having destroyed his egotism and renounced the fruit of action, becomes a mere machine moving at the will and pleasure of the Master Mechanic or an instrument in the hands of God. The question, therefore, of his earning merit or demerit does not arise. On the other hand, the ignorant man is always counting his merit and demerit, and sinking deeper and deeper into the pit, so that in the end the only thing he has earned is demerit. But as regards the man who destroys his own ignorance by wisdom from day to day, his spontaneous actions grow purer and purer, and appear perfect and meritorious in the world's eyes. He sees all things equal. He is equiminded towards a learned and humble *Brahma* (God)-knowing *Brahmin,* a cow, an elephant, a dog and a degraded human being who is worse than a beast. That is to say, he serves them all with equal devotion. He does not honour any one of them or treat another with contempt. The man of selfless action holds himself to be the world's debtor, and he repays what he owes to everyone else and does him full justice. Here on earth he takes the creation captive and is filled with the spirit of the Supreme. He is not elated if anybody does something pleasant; nor is he pained if foul abuse is poured upon him. The man attached to the world seeks happiness from outside himself. On the other hand, he who acts in a spirit of selfless detachment discovers the spring of eternal peace in himself, having withdrawn his mind from external objects. All sensual pleasures are a source of pain. One should resist the onrush of desire, anger and the like. The selfless *Yogi* is constantly engaged in doing good to all creatures. His mind is free from doubt. He is not of the world, though he is in the world. He turns his eyes inward by means of *Pranayama* (control of breath) etc. and conquers desire, fear and anger. He knows Me alone to be the Supreme Lord of all, the Friend and the recipient of sacrificial offerings, and enters into My peace.'

Chapter VI

THE Lord said: 'The man who does his duty without any selfish desire for fruit, may be called a *Sannyasi* as well as a *Yogi*. But he who abstains from action altogether, is only an idler. The root of the matter is that one should not allow his mind to flit from one object of desire to another and from that to a third. He who would practice *Yoga*, i.e., evenness of temper (*Samatvam*), cannot but perform action. The man who has achieved such evenness of temper will be serene, because his mere thoughts are charged with the strength of action. A *Yogi* is one who is not attached to the objects of sense or to action and whose mind has ceased to roam restlessly.

'A man can be saved or lost by himself alone. Therefore, he becomes his own friend or his own enemy as the case may be. To one who has subdued his mind, his soul is a friend; while the soul is an enemy for him who has failed to achieve self-control. The test for self-control is that heat and cold, pleasure and pain, honour and dishonour do not disturb one's inner serenity. He is a *Yogi* who is a man of knowledge as well as experience, who is unwavering and master of his senses and to whom gold, stone and earth seem all alike. He regards with an equal eye friend and foe, sinner and saint. With a view to attain this state, a man should stabilize his mind, divest it of all sensual desires, and meditate in solitude on the Supreme Soul. It is not enough to practise *Yogic Asanas* (postures) etc. In order to achieve evenness of temper, one must scrupulously keep the major observances (*vratas*) such as *Brahmacharya* (chastity) and the like. A man who thus takes his place on a firm seat, keeps the observances and concentrates his mind on God, enters into perfect peace.

'This equanimity is not for one who overeats or merely fasts, nor for one who is too much addicted to sleep or to vigils. Its seeker has to keep a sense of proportion in all his actions, such as eating and drinking, sleeping and keeping awake. To overeat one day and fast the next day, to oversleep for a day and keep a vigil the next, to work hard for a day and pass the next in idleness is no characteristic of a *Yogi*. The *Yogi* is stable-minded at all times, and is without effort free from all desires. He is like an unflickering lamp burning in a windless place. He is not tossed to and fro by dramatic events on the world-stage or by his own brain waves. Such mental poise can be acquired by slow but steady effort. The mind is fickle and restless, but it should be gradually stabilized, for one can have peace of mind only when he is firm of understanding. In order thus to stabilize the mind, he should constantly fix it on the soul. He will then see all beings in himself and himself in all beings, for he will see Me in all beings and all beings in Me. He who is absorbed in Me and sees Me everywhere, ceases to be himself, so that he is at all times attuned to Me irrespective of what he is doing, and is incapable of sin.'

Yoga, thus described, seemed to Arjuna to be a tall order, and he exclaimed: 'How is one to achieve such equanimity? The human mind is restless like a monkey, and as difficult to control as the wind. How is it to be curbed?'

The Lord replied: 'You are right. But if a man earnestly sets about conquering attachment and aversion, *Yoga* will not be difficult for him to practise. But it should be clear to you that it is not for one who cannot control his mind.'

Then, Arjuna posed another question: 'Supposing a man has faith, but is lax in his effort and is thus unsuccessful in perfecting himself, what happens to him? Is he destroyed like a broken cloud in the sky?'

The Lord said: 'Such a man of faith is never lost, for no one who takes the right path ever comes to an evil end. After death, he lives for a time in some celestial world according to his merit and is then reborn on the earth into a holy family. But such a birth is difficult to obtain. He then regains the mental impressions developed in his former lives, and struggling harder for perfection, reaches the supreme goal. Thus, making an assiduous effort, some attain equanimity soon, while others do so after a number of lives in accordance with the measure of their faith and endeavour. This evenness of temper is superior to asceticism, to knowledge and to sacred rites, for these latter are after all only means to the end of equanimity. Do you, therefore, become even-minded and a *Yogi*. And even among *Yogis*, hold him to be the best who dedicates his all to Me and worships Me alone in full faith.'

Pranayama (control of breath) and *Asanas* (*Yogic* postures) are referred to appreciatively in this chapter, but we should remember that at the same time the Lord has stressed the need for *Brahmacharya*, i.e., keeping the observances calculated to take us nearer and nearer to God. It should be clearly understood that the mere practice of *Asanas* and the like can never take us to the goal of even-mindedness. *Asanas* and *Pranayama* may be of some slight help in steadying the mind and making it single-purposed, provided that they are practised to that end. Otherwise, they are no better than other methods of physical training. They are very useful indeed as physical exercise, and I believe that this type of exercise is good for the soul, and may be performed from a bodily standpoint. But I have observed that these practices do only harm when indulged in for the acquisition of supernormal powers (*siddhi*) and the performance of miracles. This chapter should be studied as a summary of the teaching in the preceding three chapters. It cheers us up in our spiritual struggle. We should never be downhearted and give up the endeavour to reach evenness of temper.

Chapter VII

THE Lord said: 'O King, I will tell you how a man who devotes his whole mind to Me, takes refuge in Me and practises *Karmayoga* can have perfect knowledge of Me, free from the shadow of a doubt. I will declare to you this knowledge based on experience, which having been known, nothing more here remains to be known. Hardly one from among thousands strives to acquire this knowledge, and perhaps one only of these strivers makes a success of it.

'Earth, water, fire, air, ether, mind, intellect and egoism—this is the eightfold composition of My *Prakriti* (Nature). This is the lower nature; the other is higher nature, that is, life. This world is born of these two natures, that is to say, from the coming together of body and soul. Therefore, I am the cause of the origin and destruction of all things. As pearls are strung on a thread, even so is the world held together by Me. Thus, I am the taste in the waters, the light in the sun and the moon, the syllable "Om" in the *Vedas*, the sound in ether, the spirit of enterprise in men, the sweet smell in the earth, the brightness in fire, the life in all that lives, the austerity of ascetics, the intelligence of the intelligent, the pure strength of the strong, and the craving of all beings which does not run counter to righteousness. In short, you should understand that all that belongs to the states of *Sattiva*,* *Rajas** and *Tamas** proceeds from Me, and depends upon Me alone. People deluded by these three qualities (*gunas*) do not recognize Me Who am imperishable. My *Maya* made of these qualities is hard to overcome. But those who take refuge in Me pass beyond this *Maya*, that is, the three *gunas*. Foolish evil-doers cannot think of coming to Me even in their dreams. Being steeped in illusion, they roam in darkness and do not acquire knowledge. But the doers of good deeds worship Me. Some of them do so in order to obtain relief in their distress; others seek for knowledge of Me. A third group are inspired by a desire to get something for themselves; while others worship Me with understanding, thinking it to be their duty. Worship of Me means service of My creation. This service is rendered by some because of their misery, by others in order to gain some advantage, by a third group out of curiosity as regards the outcome of such activity, and by a fourth group who know what they are about and for whom service of others is something that they cannot do without. These last are My wise devotees, dearer to Me than all the rest of them. Or, rather they know Me best and are nearest to Me. Their wisdom is the fruit of a quest extending over a number of lives, and when they have acquired this wisdom, they see nothing in the world except Me, Vasudeva. But those, who are smitten by a variety of desires, resort to other deities. I alone, however, am the giver of rewards commensurate with the devotion of each. The achievement, too, of these devotees of limited understanding is limited, but they rest content with it. These men in their ignorance imagine that they know Me through the senses. They do not realize that My imperishable and supreme form is beyond the reach of the senses and cannot be grasped with the hands, the ears, the nose, the eyes. Thus, the ignorant do not recognize Me, though I am the creator of all things. This is my *Yogamaya* (creative power). Pleasure and pain are the necessary consequences of likes and dislikes, and keep mankind under the influence of delusion. But those who have freed themselves from delusion and purified their thoughts and actions, hold firmly to their vows and offer Me constant worship. They know Me in the form of perfect *Brahma* (the Absolute) as well as of individual selfs embodied as various kinds of creatures (*Adhyatma*), and My creative action (*Karma*). Those who thus know Me as the One who governs the material (*Adhibhuta*) and the divine (*Adhidaiva*) aspects and the sacrifices (*Adhiyajna*) and have attained evenness of temper, are released from the bondage of birth and death after they have died. For, having acquired the knowledge of reality, their mind ceases to dwell on trivialities and, seeing the whole universe to be filled with the spirit of God, they are absorbed in Him.'

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*Harmony, passion, sloth; or rhythm, activity, inertia.

Chapter VIII

ARJUNA asked: 'You spoke of *Brahma* (the Absolute), *Adhyatma, Karma, Adhibhuta, Adhidaiva* and *Adhiyajna,* but I do not understand the meaning of all these words. Again, you say that at the hour of death you are revealed to those who know you as *Adhibhuta* etc. and have attained evenness of temper. Please explain all this to me.'

The Lord replied: '*Brahma* is the imperishable, supreme aspect of God, and *Adhyatma* is the individual soul living in the body of all beings as the doer and the enjoyer. *Karma* is the process through which all beings come into existence, or, in other words, the process of the creation. *Adhibhuta* is Myself as the perishable body, and *Adhiyajna* is the individual soul purified through sacrifice. Thus, whether as the body or as the foolish soul or as the purified soul or as *Brahma,* it is I who am everywhere. And never doubt this that he who meditates on Me in all these aspects at the hour of death, forgets himself, is careful of nothing and desirous of nothing, will be united with Me. Whatever a man constantly dwells on in his mind and remembers at the time of death, is realized by him. Therefore, at all times, you should remember Me and set your mind and heart upon Me and you will surely come to Me. You may say that it is hard thus to stabilize the mind. But you take it from Me that one can become single-minded by daily practice and constant endeavour, for, as I told you just now, all embodied beings are in the essence Myself in various forms. For this, he should prepare himself from the very first so that his mind does not go astray at the time of death, but is steeped in devotion, keeps the life force (*prana*) steady, and thinks only of Me as the omniscient, the ancient, the ruler, the subtle supporter of all and dispeller of ignorance like the sun which drives darkness away.

'This supreme state is known to the *Vedas* as *Akshara* (the Imperishable) *Brahma* and is reached by sages who have freed themselves from likes and dislikes. All who desire to reach it observe *Brahmacharya*, i.e., keep body, mind and speech under control and give up all objects of sense in these three ways. Men and women who die, having controlled the senses and uttering the sacred syllable "Om" and remembering Me as they depart, reach the supreme state. Their mind is never distracted by other thoughts, and when they have thus come to Me, they are not reborn into this painful condition. To come to Me is the only means of breaking the vicious circle of birth and death.

'Men measure time by the human span of a hundred years, and during that period do thousands of questionable deeds. But time is infinite. A thousand *Yugas* (ages) make up the day of *Brahma;* compared with it, a human day or even a hundred years of human life are as nothing. What is the use of counting such infinitesimal measures of time? Human life is as only a moment in the infinite cycle of time. It is up to us, therefore, to think of God alone to the exclusion of all else. How can we afford to run after momentary pleasures? Creation and dissolution have gone on unceasingly during *Brahma's* day and night, and will do so in future, too.

'*Brahma*, who creates and dissolves beings, is only an aspect of Me. He is the unmanifested which cannot be perceived by the senses. Beyond this unmanifested, there is yet another unmanifested aspect of Mine of which I have spoken to you. He who reaches it, is not reborn, for there is no day or night so far as this is concerned. This is a calm and immovable aspect, which can be realized only by single-minded devotion. It supports and pervades the whole universe.

'It is said that one who dies in the bright half of the month during *Uttarayana* (the northward movement of the sun from January to July) comes to Me if he is mindful of Me at last, and that he who dies in the dark half of the month during *Dakshinayana* (the southward movement from July to January) is reborn into the world. *Uttarayana* and the bright fortnight here may be interpreted to mean the path of selfless service; and *Dakshinayana* and the dark half of month mean selfishness. The path of service is the path of wisdom, and the path of selfishness is the path of ignorance. He who treads the path of wisdom is released from the bondage of birth and death, while he who takes the path of ignorance becomes a bondslave. After having realized the difference between the two, who would be so foolish as to prefer to walk in the way of ignorance? All men should learn to discriminate between the paths, renounce all fruits of merit, act in a spirit of detachment and discharge their duty with all their heart and soul, and thus endeavour to reach the supreme state described by Me.'

Chapter IX

HAVING described the lofty state of a *Yogi* in the last verse of the preceding chapter, the Lord now naturally proceeds to sing the glory of *Bhakti* (devotion). For, the *Yogi* in terms of the *Gita* is neither a dry-as-dust man of knowledge, nor a devotee carried away by his own enthusiasm, but a selfless performer of action imbued with the spirit of wisdom as well as devotion. So the Lord said: 'As you are free from hatred, I shall now tell you the secret of wisdom, a knowledge of which will contribute to your welfare. This is the holy knowledge above all others, and is easy to translate into action. Those who have no faith in it, fail to find Me. Men cannot perceive My unmanifested form by their senses; yet it pervades the universe. It supports the universe; the universe does not support it. Again, in a sense, it may be said that all these beings are not in Me, and I am not in them. Although I am the source of all beings and their sustainer, they are not in Me and I am not in them; for in ignorance they do not know Me and are not devoted to Me. Know this to be my divine mystery.

'But, though it seems as if I am not in these beings, I am like the air moving everywhere. All creatures pass into My nature at the end of a cycle, and are reborn at the beginning of creation. These acts are Mine, but they do not bind Me, for I act in spirit of detachment and am indifferent as to the fruit they bear. These events happen as such is My nature. But people do not recognize Me in such a guise and deny My existence altogether. They entertain vain aspirations, perform vain actions and are full of ignorance, so that they can be said to partake of the nature of demons. But those who abide in the divine nature, know and worship Me as the imperishable creator. They are firm in their determination. They are always striving for virtue, praising Me, and meditating on Me. Others again believe Me to be one or to be many. There are countless attributes of Me; therefore, those who believe Me to be many, think of different faces of Mine. But one and all, they are my devotees.

'I am the intention to offer a sacrifice, I the sacrifice itself, I the offering made to the spirits of the fathers, I the herb, I the sacred verse (*mantra*), I the oblation, I the fire to which it is offered. I am the father of this world, I the mother, the supporter and the grandsire, the object of knowledge, the syllable "Om" *Rigveda,** *Samaveda** and *Yajurveda.** I am the end of the pilgrim's path, the sustainer, the lord, the witness. I am the shelter, the lover, the origin, the dissolution, heat and cold, being and non-being. Those who perform the rites mentioned in the *Vedas*, do so in order to gain their fruit. They may thus attain the world of heaven, but they have to return to the world of mortals and to die. But if a man meditates upon Me with an undistracted mind and worships Me alone, I bear all his burdens, supply all his needs and protect his possessions. Some others who worship other deities with faith in their hearts are victims of ignorance, but they are really worshipping Me for I am the lord of all sacrifices. However, they do not know Me in My comprehensive nature and, therefore, are unable to reach the supreme state. Worshippers of the gods go to the world of the gods; the ancestor worshippers to the world of the fathers; and those who worship the spirits, go to the spirits; while those who worship Me with the right approach, come to Me. I accept the offering of love made by seekers, even if it be only a leaf or a flower. Therefore, whatever you do, do it only as an offering to Me, so that your responsibility for the good and evil results will cease altogether. As you will have renounced all the fruits of action, there will be no more births and deaths for you. I am the same to all beings; none is the hateful or dear to Me. But those who worship Me with devotion are in Me, and I am in them. This is not partiality, but only the natural consequence of their devotion. Devotion, indeed, works wonders. He who worships Me in utter devotion becomes a saint, even if he has been a sinner. As darkness vanishes before the sun, a man abandons his evil ways as soon as he comes to Me. Therefore, know for certain that My devotee shall not perish. He becomes a man of religion and enters into My peace. Those who are born in the so-called lower castes and illiterate women, *Vaishyas* and *Shudras* who take refuge in Me, come to Me. It goes without saying, that so do *Brahmins* and *Kshatriyas* who lead a holy life. Every devotee enjoys the fruit of his devotion. Therefore, you, who have been born in this unsubstantial world, should worship Me and work out your salvation. Fix your mind on Me, be devoted to Me, offer your sacrifices for My sake, prostrate yourself before Me. And if you are intent on Me and reduce yourself to zero by attuning yourself to Me, you are sure to come to Me.'

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*The three oldest sacred books of the Hindus (*trayi*).

Note: We learn from this chapter that devotion (*Bhakti*) means attachment (*Asakti*) to God. This is the royal road to the cultivation of a selfless spirit. Therefore, we are told at the very beginning that devotion is the sovereign *Yoga* and is easy to practise. It is easy to practise if it takes hold of our heart, but hard going if it does not. Hence, it has been described as something for which we have to offer our life itself as the price. But he who has plunged into it, enjoys perfect bliss though it scares the mere spectator. Sudhanva was laughing as he lay in the boiling oil, while the bystanders were seized with terror and anxiety. The 'untouchable' Nanda is said to have danced, as he was tried by the ordeal of fire. We need not bother whether or not these are true stories. But the fact is that a man reaches such a state of calmness and imperturbability when he is absorbed in something or other. He forgets himself. But who would set his heart on anything except God? 'Do not prefer the bitter *nimba* to sugar-cane or the glow-worm to the sun and the moon'. The Ninth Chapter thus shows that renunciation of the fruit of action is impossible without devotion (*Bhakti*). Its last verse sums up the whole chapter and, in a word, means: 'Seeking nothing, give yourself utterly to Me'.

Chapter X

THE Lord said: 'Hear once more what I say with a view to the welfare of devotees. Even gods and great sages do not know My beginning, for the very simple reason that I am without beginning Myself and am the origin of the universe, including gods and sages. The wise man, who knows Me to be unborn and without beginning, is liberated from all sins, for when he realizes Me as such and himself as My child or as part and parcel of Me, he overcomes the human liability to sin. Ignorance of one's real nature is the root of sin.

'As all beings derive from Me, so do the various natures distributed to them, such as, for instance, forgiveness, truth, joy and sorrow, birth and death, fear and fearlessness. Those who know all these to be My glorious manifestations, easily become even-minded as they cease to be egotistic. Their heart is fixed on Me. They dedicate their all to Me. I am the only subject of their conversation. They glorify Me and live in happiness and contentment. To these loving worshippers always aware of Me, I grant the power of understanding, by means of which they come to Me.'

Arjuna then praised the Lord: 'You are the Supreme *Brahma*, the Highest Abode, and the Lord. You yourself say that sages worship you as the First of the Gods, the Birthless, the All-pervading. O Lord, O Father, no one knows your real nature; it is known to you alone. Now please tell me your glorious manifestations, and explain to me how I may recognize you by meditation.'

The Lord replied: 'There is no end to My divine manifestations, but I shall name the chief of these only. I am the *Atman* (soul) dwelling in the heart of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle and the end of them all. Of the *Adityas*, I am Vishnu. Among the lights, I am the light-giving sun. Of the *Maruts* (wind-gods), I am Marichi. Among the stars, I am the moon. Of the *Vedas*, I am the *Samaveda*. Of the gods, I am Indra. Of the sense-organs, I am the mind. Of beings, I am consciousness. Of the *Rudras*, I am Shankara (Shiva). Of the *Yakshas* and *Rakshasas*, I am Kubera. Of the *Daityas* (demons), I am Prahlad. Of beasts, I am the lion. Of birds I am the eagle. Indeed, I am even the gambling of the cheats. Whatever, good or evil, happens in this world, happens only by My permission. Realizing this, men should give up their pride and steer clear of evil, for I am the dispenser of the fruits of their good and bad deeds. You should realize that only a single fraction of Mine sustains the entire universe.'

Chapter XI

ARJUNA, asking the Lord for a favour, said: 'O Supreme Lord, by teaching me the truth about the soul, you have dispelled my ignorance. You are All, the Creator and the Destroyer, being Imperishable yourself. If possible, please let me have a vision of your Divine Form.'

The Lord said: 'There are thousands of My divine forms in various colours. The *Adityas*, the *Vasus* and the *Rudras*[*]—all are unified in My body, as well as all things, animate and inanimate. But you cannot see this My Form with those fleshly eyes. Therefore I give you divine sight with which to see Me.'

Sanjaya said to Dhritarashtra: 'O King, speaking thus to Arjuna, the Lord revealed to him His marvellous Form which defies description. We see a single sun in the sky every day, but supposing a thousand suns were blazing in the sky, the glory of what Arjuna saw was more dazzling than their accumulated light. The ornaments and the weapons of that Form were similarly divine. Arjuna's hair then stood erect. And he spoke, shaking all over.

Arjuna said: 'O God, I see everything and everybody within your body. *Brahma* and Shiva are there, and so are the sages and the holy serpents. I see you with countless arms and faces, and find no beginning, middle or end. You shine like a mass of insufferable light, and blaze like fire. You are the ultimate foundation of the universe, the Ancient of Days, and the guardian of eternal law. Wherever I look, I see parts of your body. The sun and the moon are your eyes, as it were. You pervade heaven and earth. Your splendour burns up the universe. This world is seized with awe. The gods, the sages, and the *siddhas*—all are standing with clasped hands and sing your praise. On seeing this stupendous Form and brilliance, I lose my nerve. My patience and peace are gone. O God, have mercy on me. I see these people rush into your mouth, frightful with tusks, as moths fly into a flame and you crush them to powder. Who are you with such an awful Form? I cannot understand your ways.'

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[*] Various classes of Hindu gods.

The Lord said: 'I am Time, the destroyer of worlds. You may or may not fight, but the warriors on both the sides are bound to perish. You are only an instrument of the Divine Will.'

Arjuna said: 'O God, home of all the world, you are the Imperishable, being and non-being and what is beyond either of them. You are the First of the Gods, the Ancient of Days; you are the refuge of the world. You are the one thing which is to be known. You are *Vayu* (wind), *Yama* (the God of death and judgment), *Agni* (fire) and *Prajapati* (the Creator). Hail to you a thousand times. Now please show me your original Form again.'

The Lord then said: 'I showed My world-wide Form to you, because I love you. You have seen to-day something the vision of which cannot be won by *Vedic* or any other studies, rituals, alms or austerities. Do not be bewildered because you have seen it. Cast away fear, be calm and see My familiar Form. That shape of Mine which you have seen is hard to see even for the gods, and can be seen only by pure devotion. Whoever works for Me, makes Me his supreme good, becomes My devotee, frees himself from attachment and loves all beings, comes to Me.'

I have deliberately cut this as well as the last chapter short. This one is full of poetry and, therefore, should be read frequently either in the original or in translation, so that we may be imbued with the spirit of devotion. Whether we are or not thus imbued, can be found by applying the acid test mentioned in the last verse. Devotion is impossible in the absence of total self-surrender and all-embracing love. Self-surrender and a sense of solidarity with all living beings become easy of attainment if we meditate on God as world-destroying time, into whose gaping mouths the universe rushes to its doom. This fate is bound to overtake us, too, all of a sudden, whether we wish for it or not. Thus all distinctions of small and big, high and low, man and woman, men and the lower animals disappear. Seeing that we are all a mere morsel in the mouth of God as the Destroyer, we should become humble and reduce ourselves to zero and cultivate friendship with every one else. If we do this, we shall cease to be afraid of this terrible Form of God. On the other hand, it will give us peace of mind.

Chapter XII

ARJUNA asks the Lord: 'Some devotees adore a personal (*Sakara*) God, while others worship the Absolute (*Nirakara*). Which of these two courses is better?'

The Lord replies: 'Those who fix their minds on Me (as the One Life in all) with perfect faith and are absorbed in Me, are My devotees indeed. But those who worship the Absolute and restrain and subdue their senses, are equiminded towards all living beings and serve them without looking on some as of a superior and others as of an inferior grade—they also will come to Me. Neither of these two classes of devotees is superior to the other. But a full realization of the Absolute is almost impossible for an embodied being. The Absolute is devoid of all attributes and thus difficult for men even to imagine. Therefore, they are all worshippers of a personal God, whether they are aware of it or not.

'Do you, therefore, place your mind in Me (the personal God in the universal form) and offer Me your all.

If this is not possible, try to restrain the aberrations of the mind; that is to say, by observing the *Yamas* and *Nyamas*, and with the help of *Pranayama* and *Yogic* exercises, obtain control over the mind. If even this is beyond your capacity, perform all actions for My sake, so that your delusion will be destroyed, and you will be imbued with the spirit of detachment and devotion. If you cannot do even this, renounce the fruits of action, that is, cease to have a desire for the fruits of action, and do the task which is allotted to you. A man can never have any say as regards the fruit of his action, as the nature of the fruit is determined by a number of independent factors. Be you, therefore, a mere instrument in My hands, I have thus described four methods, none of which is superior to the others. You may adopt any one of the four you like. It may seem as if the path of knowledge (hearing the doctrine, pondering over it, etc.) is easier to take than that of *Yamas, Nyamas, Pranayama, Asanas* etc. Meditation in worship is easier still and the renunciation of the fruit the easiest of all. But the same method is not equally well suited for all. And some seekers have to adopt all the four methods, which are inter-connected. You must become a devotee one way or other; you may take any path that leads to this destination.

'Let me tell you what the true devotee is like. He does not hate or bear ill-will to any living creature. He looks on all with love and compassion. He is free from the delusion of "I" and "Mine". He reduces himself to zero. Pleasure and pain are equally acceptable to him. He forgives the wrong-doer even as he expects to be forgiven himself. He is always contented with his lot, and is unshakable in his resolve. He dedicates his intellect and mind and all to Me. He never molests his fellow-creatures; these are, therefore, never afraid of him. He does not allow himself to become perturbed by the world. He is free from exultation, sorrow, anger, fear and the like. He seeks nothing for himself. He is pure and skilful in action. He renounces every undertaking. Although he is firm in his resolve, he is indifferent as regards the success or failure of his action; that is to say, he is not anxious about its result. He is alike to friend and foe. Honour and insult are the same to him. He is silent and content with what comes. He moves freely as if he were alone. He has a steady mind at all times and places. A devotee who behaves like this in faith is dear to Me.'

Q. The devotee 'renounces all undertakings.' What does this mean?

A. The devotee will not draw up schemes of future expansion. For example, if a merchant, who deals in cloth now, has any plans of selling firewood as well in the future, or if he, having one shop only, thinks of opening five more shops, that would be *Arambha* (undertaking) on his part, and the devotee will have none of it. This principle is applicable to service of the nation as well. For instance, a worker in the *Khadi* department to-day will not take up cow-keeping to-morrow, agriculture the day after and medical aid on the fourth day. He will do his best in whatever has come to him. When I am free from egoism, nothing remains for me to do.

Chapter XIII

THE Lord said: '*Kshetra* (the Field) is another name for the human body, and *Kshetrajna* means one who knows the Field. Understand Me as the knower of the Field in all bodies. Real knowledge means discrimination between the Field and the knower of the Field. The five great elements, namely, earth, water, fire, air and ether, individuality (*Ahamkara*), intellect, the unmanifest, the ten senses,* mind, the five sense objects, desire and hatred, pleasure and pain, *Sanghata* (the power of combination inherent in the constituents of the body), consciousness and cohesion—these constitute the Field with it modifications. Knowledge of these is essential, as they have to be renounced. Wisdom is the foundation on which such renunciation can be based. Wisdom here means and includes humility, unpretentiousness, non-violence, forgiveness, rectitude, service of the teacher, purity, steadfastness, self-restraint, indifference to sense objects, absence of egoism, insight into the evil of birth, death, old age, disease and pain, detachment from wife and children, hearth and home, friends and relations, equimindedness to good and bad fortune, wholehearted devotion to God, love of solitude, dislike for the enjoyment of sensual pleasures in company with others, thirst for knowledge of the soul, and at last the Beatific Vision. And the reverse of this is ignorance. Now let me tell you something about that which has to be known with a view to salvation. That is beginningless supreme *Brahma*. *Brahma* is beginningless because it is unborn and was there when there was nothing. It is neither *Sat* (existent) nor *Asat* (non-existent), but beyond them both. But, from another standpoint, it can be called *Sat*, because it is eternal. Human beings cannot recognize it as such; therefore, it is said to be beyond even *Sat*. It pervades the whole universe. It may be said to have a

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*The five organs of perception, *viz.* hearing, touch, sight, taste and smell, and the five organs of action, *viz.*, tongue, feet, hands and the organs of evacuation and reproduction.

thousand hands and feet, and though it seems to have hands and feet, it is devoid of the organs of sense for it does not need these organs. Sense organs are transitory, while *Brahma* is eternal. And although being all-pervasive and all-sustaining, it may be said to be enjoying the qualities (*Gunas*), it is free from them. Where there are *Gunas*, there is change (*Vikara*), but *Brahma* is changeless. It may be said to be outside all beings, because it is out for those who do not know it. And it is within all beings as it is all-pervading. Similarly, it is both moving and unmoving. It is subtle and hence imperceptible. It is distant as well as near. It is undivided in the sense that it is imperishable though name (*Nama*) and form (*Rupa*) perish, but it also seems to be divided as we say that it is within all creatures. It creates, preserves and destroys. It is the light of lights beyond darkness, and the end of all knowledge. *Brahma* which is planted in every heart is *Jneya*, the one thing worth knowing. All knowledge is a means to the end of being united with it.

'God and his *Maya* (Nature) are both without beginning. Modifications (*Vikaras*) are born of *Maya* and these give rise to various kinds of action (*Karma*). On account of *Maya*, the soul experiences pleasure and pain and the fruit of merit (*Punya*) and demerit (*Papa*). He who, having realized this, does his duty in a spirit of detachment, is not born again in spite of his activity, for he beholds the face of God in all faces, and seeing that not a leaf moves but by the Divine Will, he is free from egotism, understands that he is separate from the body and the soul, though living in the body, remains by means of knowledge unaffected like the omnipresent ether.

Chapter XIV

THE Lord said: 'Once more I will teach you that supreme wisdom which enabled sages to reach the highest perfection. People who find that wisdom and do their duty accordingly, are delivered from the cycle of births and deaths. O Arjuna, know Me to be the father and mother of all beings. The three *Gunas* born of nature, *viz.*, *Sattva*, (goodness), *Rajas* (passion) and *Tamas* (ignorance) bind the soul down. They may be described respectively as the highest, the middling and the lowest. Of these, *Sattva* is pure and unsullied and gives light; it is, therefore, the source of happiness. *Rajas* arises from attachment and craving, and makes a man indulge in all manner of activities. *Tamas* is rooted in ignorance and delusion, and makes one negligent and indolent. In short, *Sattva* makes for happiness, *Rajas* for restlessness and *Tamas* for sloth. Sometimes *Sattva* prevails, overpowering *Rajas* and *Tamas;* at other times *Rajas* prevails, overpowering *Sattva* and *Tamas*; at still other times *Tamas* prevails, overpowering *Sattva* and *Rajas.* When the light of wisdom shines through all the activities of the body, it may be known that *Sattva* is increasing. Where greed, bustle, unrest and competition are observed, *Rajas* is the ruler. And the predominance of *Tamas* is characterized by ignorance, sloth and delusion. If *Sattva* prevails in a man's life, he is born in the sinless worlds of the great sages after death. If *Rajas* dominates his life, he is born among those who are attached to action. And if *Tamas* is the ruling principle, he returns to the womb of the senseless. The fruit of *Sattvika* action is purity, while the fruit of *Rajas* is pain, and the fruit of *Tamas* is ignorance. A *Sattvika* man rises to the higher regions; a *Rajasa* person remains in this world, while a *Tamas* individual sinks to the underworld. When a man perceives no doer of action other than these qualities and knows Me who am beyond them, he enters into My nature. When the dweller in the body has overcome the three qualities from which all bodies arise, he is freed from birth and death, old age and pain and drinks the nectar of eternal life.'

On hearing that one who transcends the qualities makes such great progress on the pilgrim's path, Arjuna asked: 'What are the marks of such perfection? How does such a perfect being conduct himself? And how does he cross over the qualities'?

The Lord replied: 'A man is said to have risen above the qualities when he is not angry if the light and knowledge of *Sattva* or the activity and bustle of *Rajas* or the delusion and ignorance of *Tamas* are there, and is not wishful if they are not. He sits like one who is unconcerned and is not disturbed by the qualities. He stands apart unmoved, being aware that they are the doers of all actions. He is even-minded to pleasure and pain as well as to a lump of earth, a stone and gold. The pleasant and the unpleasant are alike to him. He is unaffected by either praise or blame. He is the same in honour and evil fame. He is alike to friend and foe. And he has abandoned all undertakings.

'Do not think that this is a goal you can never reach and that, therefore, you need not exert yourself. What I have described is the state of a perfect man. The way to it is to serve Me with single-minded devotion. From the Third Chapter onwards, I have pointed out that a man cannot so much as even breathe without action (*Karma*), from which no human being can ever hope to escape. He who would transcend the qualities, should dedicate all his actions to Me, and cease to desire their fruits. If he does this, his actions will not be an impediment to his progress, for I am *Brahma,* Immortal Life, the Eternal Law and Joy for ever.

'When a man reduces himself to zero, he sees Me alone everywhere. He is *Guna-atita* (one who has crossed over the qualities).'

Chapter XV

THE Lord said: 'This world is like an *Ashvattha* (sacred fig) tree, with roots above and branches below, and with the *Vedic* hymns as its leaves. And he who knows it, knows the *Vedas.* The branches of this cosmic tree nourished by the qualities 'shoot to heaven and sink to earth' (Sir Edwin Arnold). Sense objects are its sprouts. It is these things of the senses which bind the soul with the bonds of *Karma* in the world of men.

'The real nature of this tree cannot be known here, nor its beginning, nor end, nor foundation.

'This strongly rooted cosmic tree should be cut down with the weapon of non-co-operation, so that the soul may rise to a higher world from which there is no return to the world of mortals. With this end in view, a man should engage himself in the constant worship of the Ancient of Days, from whom all this activity (the cosmic process) seems to flow. The wise man who is free from pride and delusion, victorious over the vice of attachment and devoted to the Supreme Soul, who is free from cravings and to whom pleasure and pain are alike,—that wise man reaches the state which is beyond all change, and which does not need to be illumined by the sun, the moon or fire. That is My supreme abode.

'An eternal part of Myself transformed into the individual soul in this world, draws to itself the senses including the mind which reside in matter. When the soul enters the body or leaves it, it takes these senses with it even as the wind carries fragrance from its places. It enjoys sense objects with the help of the ear, the eye, the senses of touch and taste, the nose and the mind. The ignorant cannot recognize it as it goes or stays or enjoys itself under the influence of the qualities, but the sages see it with the eye of wisdom. Striving *Yogis* see it living in their own bodies, but those who have not achieved evenness of temper cannot see it even if they try.

'The light of the sun that illumines all the world, that which is in the moon and in fire,—know that all that light is Mine. Permeating the soil, I sustain all living beings. I become the sap-producing moon and feed the plants. Becoming the fire of life in the bodies of all living creatures and being united with the life breaths, I digest the four kinds of food. I abide in all hearts. From Me, are memory and wisdom as well as their absence. I am that which is to be known by all the *Vedas*. So also I am the author of *Vedanta* and the knower of the *Vedas*.

'There may be said to be two kinds of personalities in this world, namely *Kshara* (the perishable) and *A-kshara* (the imperishable). The perishable is all beings; and the imperishable is I who inspire them, and am the same for ever. But beyond either is the highest spirit who is called the Supreme Soul, and who, pervading all, sustains the three worlds. This, too, is I. I, therefore, transcend the perishable and even the imperishable, and am known in the world as well as in the *Vedas* as the

Supreme Reality. The wise man who recognizes Me as such knows all that need be known, and serves Me with his whole being.

"O sinless Arjuna, I have told you this most secret teaching. By knowing this, a man becomes truly wise and reaches the shores of salvation."

Chapter XVI

THE Lord said: 'I will now point out the distinction between the divine and the demoniacal natures. Among the signs of the divine are fearlessness, purity of heart, wisdom, evenness of temper, self-control, alms-giving, sacrifice, study of the scriptures, austerity, straightforwardness, non-violence, truth, freedom from anger, renunciation, peacefulness, not speaking evil of others, compassion to all living beings, absence of greed, gentleness, modesty, absence of fickleness, vigour, forgiveness, fortitude, purity, internal as well as external, freedom from malice and pride.

'Among the signs of the demoniacal are hypocrisy, arrogance, conceit, anger, cruelty and ignorance.

'The divine nature leads to liberation, while the demoniacal leads to bondage. O Arjuna, you are born with the endownments of the divine nature.

'I will say something more about the demoniacal nature, so that people may easily give it up. Men of such a nature do not know what to do and what to refrain from doing. There is no purity or truth in them, so that they do not observe the rules of good conduct.

'They hold that the world is unreal, without basis or ruler. For them, sex is all the world so that they think of nothing except enjoyment of the objects of sense.

'They do horrible deeds. They are dull-witted. They hold fast to their wicked thoughts and all their activity is directed only to the destruction of the world. Their desires are insatiable. They are full of hypocrisy, pride and ignorance. They are thus plagued by innumerable cares. They want fresh sensual pleasures every day. They are "ensnared in nooses of a hundred idle hopes" (Arnold), and by unlawful means amass wealth in order to gratify their desires.

'"I got this to-day; I will get that to-morrow. I killed this one enemy to-day; I will also kill others. I am a man of might. I have great possessions. Who is my equal? With a view to fame, I will sacrifice to the gods; give alms and make merry". They say this to themselves with a chuckle, and being caught in the net of delusion, go to hell at last.

'Men with such a nature, given over to pride, speak ill of others and thus hate God who dwells in all hearts. They are, therefore, frequently born in the wombs of degraded parents.

'There are three gates to hell, leading to the ruin of the soul: lust, anger and greed. Therefore, we should renounce them all. Turning aside from them, men go by the strait and narrow path and reach the highest state.

'He who disregards the scriptures composed of eternal principals and gives himself up to pleasure, cannot attain happiness or peace characteristic of the right way.

'Therefore, in deciding what you must do and what you must not do, you should acquire the knowledge of fundamental and immutable principles from wise men and think and act accordingly.'

Chapter XVII

ARJUNA asked: 'What happens to those who serve in faith, neglecting the prevailing code of conduct?'

The Lord replied: 'There are three kinds of faith, characterized by *Sattva, Rajas* or *Tamas* as the case may be. As is a man's faith, so is he.

'*Sattvika* men worship the gods; *Rajasa* men worship demigods, and demons; and *Tamasa* men worship the spirits of the dead.

'The nature of a man's faith cannot be ascertained offhand. In order to assess it correctly, one must know the precise nature of his food, austerity, sacrifice and alms-giving.

'Foods which make for long life and increase the vital force, energy, strength and health, are said to be *Sattvika. Rajasa* foods are violently bitter, sour, hot or pungent, and give rise to disease and aches and pains. And cooked food which is stale or gives out a bad smell and the leavings of others are said to be *Tamasa.*

'The sacrifice which is offered as a matter of duty, without expecting a reward and with mental concentration, is said to be *Sattvika.* A *Rajasa* sacrifice is that in which a reward is desired and which is offered for outward show. And a *Tamasa* sacrifice is one in which scriptural rules are disobeyed, no eatables or alms are given away and no hymns are chanted.

'Honouring the saintly, purity, *Brahmacharya* and non-violence, constitute austerity of the body. Truthful, pleasant and beneficial speech, as well as a study of the scriptures, is austerity of the speech. And cheerfulness, gentleness, silence, self-control and purity of motive—these are called the austerity of the mind. Such austerity of the mind, body and speech as is practised without desire of fruit by men with an evenness of temper, is said to be *Sattvika*. Austerity practised for ostentation and with a view to gaining honour, is said to be *Rajasa*. And austerity done by obstinate fools, with self-torture or with the object of hurting others, is said to be *Tamasa*.

'A gift, "made in due place, due time and to a fit recipient" without expecting a reward and with a feeling that it is right for a man to give, is said to be *Sattvika*. A gift, made grudgingly with a view to getting something in return, is regarded as *Rajasa*. And the gift, which is given in a contemptuous spirit, and without honour done to the recipient and without considering the proper time and place for it, is said to be *Tamasa*.

'*Brahma* is designated in the *Vedas* as *Om-Tat-Sat*. Therefore, men of faith pronounce the sacred syllable *Om* when they commence any rite of sacrifice, alms-giving or austerity. This single syllable stands for *Brahma*. *Tat* means *that*. And *Sat* means *Satya*, beneficent. That is to say, God is one, He alone is, He alone is Truth and the benefactor of the world. He who offers a sacrifice, makes gifts or practises austerity with a realization of this truth and in a spirit of dedication, is a man of *Sattvika* faith. And he is free from blame if he, knowingly or unknowingly, does something different from the correct procedure in the spirit of dedication. But acts undertaken in the absence of such a spirit, are said to be performed without faith and, therefore, are *Asat* (unreal).'

Chapter XVIII

EVEN after he had pondered over the teaching in all the previous chapters, there was still a doubt in Arjuna's mind. So he said: "The *Sannyasa* of the Gita seems to be different from renunciation as currently understood. Are *Sannyasa* and *Tyaga* really different?'

While resolving Arjuna's doubt in answer to this question, the Lord summarized the *Gita* doctrine in a concise manner: 'Some actions are motivated by desire. Various activities are indulged in by men with a view to fulfil various desires. These are called *Kamya* actions. Then again, there are certain necessary and natural actions such as breathing, eating, drinking, lying down, sitting etc. with a view to keep the body a fit instrument of service. And thirdly, there are actions done with a view to serve others. Giving up *Kamya* actions is *Sannyasa,* and renunciation of fruits of all actions is *Tyaga* as recommended to you all along.

'Some people maintain that there is evil, no matter how little, in all actions whatever. Even so, a man must not give up actions done with a view to *Yajna* (sacrifice), that is to say, the service of others. Alms-giving and austerity are included in *Yajna.* But even while serving others, a man should act in a spirit of detachment. Otherwise, his activity is likely to be mixed up with evil.

'Renunciation, owing to ignorance of duties that must be done, is said to be inspired by *Tamas.* Giving up any action merely because it involves physical suffering, is said to be *Rajasa.* But service, rendered to others because of a feeling that it must be done and without the desire for the fruits, is real *Sattvika Tyaga.* In this *Tyaga,* therefore, there is no giving up of all actions, but only of the fruit of duties that must be done, and of course of other, that is, *Kamya* actions. When a wise man acts in such a selfless spirit, all his doubts are dispelled, his motives are pure and he has no thought of personal comfort and discomfort.

'He who does not abandon the fruits of action, must enjoy or put up with the natural consequences of his own acts, and is thus a bond-slave for ever. But he who gives up the fruits of action, achieves freedom.

'And why should a man feel attachment for action? It is idle for anybody to imagine that he himself is a doer. There are five causes for the accomplishment of all actions, namely, this body, the doer, the various instruments, efforts, and, last but by no means the least, Providence.

'Realizing this, a man should give up pride. He who does something without egoism, may be said to be not doing it in spite of his doing it, for he is not bound by his action. Of a humble man, who has reduced himself to zero, it may be said that he does not kill though he kills. This does not mean that the man in spite of his humility may kill and yet be unaffected by the killing. For, no occasion can arise for such a man to indulge in violence.

'There are three things that inspire action: knowledge, the object of knowledge and the knower. And there are three constituents of action: the organ, the deed and the doer. The thing to be done is the object of knowledge; the method of doing it is knowledge and he who knows it is the knower. After he has thus received an impulse to action, he performs an action in which the senses serve as instruments. Thought is thus translated into action:

'That by which a man is able
"To see one changeless Life in all the lives"

—EDWIN ARNOLD

And to realize the essential unity that underlies all diversities, is *Sattvika* knowledge. In *Rajasa* knowledge, one holds that there are different souls in different creatures; while in *Tamasa* knowledge, a man does not know a thing and imagines that everything is mixed up without rhyme and reason.

'Similarly, there are three kinds of action. Action, in which there are no likes and dislikes and no desire for personal gains, is *Sattvika*. That in which there are a desire for enjoyment, egoism and restlessness, is *Rajasa* action. And *Tamasa* action is one in which no thought at all is given to personal capacity and consequential injury or violence, and which is undertaken through delusion.

'So also there are three classes of doers. A *Sattvika* doer is free from attachment and egoism and yet firm and enterprising, and is neither elated by success nor worried by failure. A *Rajasa* doer is impassioned, greedy and violent, "slave by turns of sorrow and of joy" (Edwin Arnold) and of course desires to obtain the fruit of his actions. And a *Tamasa* doer is unsystematic, procastinating, obstinate, malicious and indolent; in short, without an iota of self-culture.

'Intellect, firmness and happiness also are said to be of three kinds.

'The *Sattvika* intellect is able properly to distinguish between action and non-action,

> *"What must be done, and what must not be done,*
> *What should be feared, and what should not be feared,*
> *What binds and what emancipates the soul."*
>
> —EDWIN ARNOLD

The *Rajasa* intellect tries to draw these distinctions, but generally fails to do so correctly; while the *Tamasa* intellect "looks upon wrong as right and sees all things contrariwise of truth" (Edwin Arnold).

'Firmness is the power of taking up some thing and sticking to it through thick and thin. It is, more or less, inherent in all things; otherwise the world could not subsist for a single moment. Firmness is *Sattvika* when there is a constantly maintained balance between the activities of the mind, the vital airs (*Pranas*) and the senses. The firmness by which a man holds fast to duty, pleasure and wealth from attachment and with a view to personal advantage, is *Rajasa*. And firmness is *Tamasa*,

> "Wherewith the fool
> *Cleaves to his sloth, his sorrow and his fears,*
> *His vanity and despair.*"
>
> —EDWIN ARNOLD

'Sattvika happiness is the

> "*Pleasure that endures,*
> *Banishing pain for aye, bitter at first*
> *As poison to the soul, but afterwards*
> *Sweet as the taste of* Amrit"
>
> —EDWIN ARNOLD

It arises from true self-knowledge.

'*Rajasa* happiness arises from sensual enjoyment.

> ". . . *Sweet*
> *As* Amrit *is its first taste, but its last*
> *Bitter as poison.*"
>
> —EDWIN ARNOLD

'And *Tamasa* happiness is that

> ". . . *Which springs*
> *From sloth and sleep and foolishness.*"
>
> —EDWIN ARNOLD

'This threefold classification is thus applicable to all things. The duties of the four *Varnas* (classes in ancient Hindu society) are fixed by reason of the dominance or recession of the qualities planted in each.

'A *Brahmin's* conduct is characterized by calmness, self-discipline, austerity, purity, forgiveness, uprightness, wisdom, experience and faith in God. The characteristics of a *Kshatriya* are valour, splendour, firmness, resourcefulness, not flying from battle, open-handedness and leadership. A *Vaishya's* task is "to till the ground, tend cattle, venture trade" (Edwin Arnold), and service is the *Shudra's* work. This is not to say that a member of any one of these classes may not be endowed with qualities characteristic of other classes, or is not entitled to cultivate them in himself. But qualities and work, as mentioned above, serve as signs for the recognition of a man's *Varna*. If the qualities and tasks of each caste are recognized, there is no undesirable competition or feeling of hatred among them. There is no question here of high and low. But if each does his duty selflessly according to his nature, he will reach perfection. Therefore, one's own duty, though it appears to be valueless, is better than the duty of another which seems to be easy. A man may remain free from sin when he performs the task naturally allotted to him, as he is then free from selfish desires; the very wish to do something else arises from selfishness. For the rest, all actions are clouded by defects as fire by smoke. But the natural duty is done without desire for its fruit, and thus loses its binding force.

'The calm *Yogi* who has been sanctified by thus performing his own duty, who has his mind under control, who has given up the five sense objects, who has overcome likes and dislikes, who lives in solitude *i.e.*, whose eyes are turned inward, who achieves mastery of his mind, body and speech by abstemiousness, who is ever conscious of the living presence of God, and who has given up pride, desire, anger, acquisitiveness and the like,—that *Yogi* is fit to be united with *Brahma*. He is equiminded towards all men. He neither rejoices nor indulges in grief. Such a devotee has true knowledge of God and is absorbed in Him. Thus, taking refuge in Me, he gains the eternal place.

'Therefore, dedicate your all to Me, regard Me as the supreme object of your love, and with discrimination, fix your mind on Me. As you do this, you will overcome all difficulties. But if, out of egoism, you do not listen to Me, you will perish. The one thing needful is that abandoning all conflicting views, you should come to Me alone for shelter, and thus be freed from sin.

'Do not tell this truth to anyone who is not a devotee, austere in life, and hating Me, does not wish to listen. But one who communicates this great secret to My devotees will surely come to Me in virtue of his devotion.'

After having thus reported to Dhritarashtra the dialogue between Arjuna and Krishna, Sanjaya said:

'Where there is Krishna, the Prince of *Yoga*, and Arjuna with his bow and arrows, there are prosperity, victory, happiness and fundamental morality.'

Krishna, to whom the epithet 'Prince of *Yoga*' has here been applied, means pure knowledge based on spiritual experience, and, by referring to Arjuna as an archer, it is suggested that where there is action in accordance with such knowledge, the doer obtains every wish that is not contrary to lofty morals.[3]

CHAPTER XXII

QUESTION BOX

Meaning of God

Q. I am reading your *Gita Bodh** these days and trying to understand it. I am puzzled by what Lord Krishna says in the 10th Discourse. 'In dicer's play, I am the conquering double eight. Nothing, either good or evil, can take place in this world without my will.' Does God then prevent evil? If so, how can He punish the evil-doer? Has God created the world for this purpose? Is it impossible then for mankind to live in peace?

A. To say that God permits evil in this world may not be pleasing to the ear. But if He is held responsible for the good, it follows that He has to be responsible for the evil, too. Did not God permit Ravana to exhibit unparalleled strength? Perhaps, the root cause of the perplexity arises from a lack of the real understanding of what God is. God is not a person. He transcends description. He is the Law-maker, the Law and the Executor. No human being can well arrogate these powers to himself. If he did, he would be looked upon as an unadulterated dictator. They become only Him whom we worship as God. This is the reality, a clear understanding of which will answer the question raised by you.

The question whether it is impossible for mankind ever to be at peace with one another, does not arise from the verse quoted. The world will live in peace only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so. No one can deny the possibility nor say when that will come to pass. Such questions are idle waste of time. To a good man, the whole world is good. By following this golden rule, you can live in peace under all circumstances, believing that what is possible for you to be is also possible for others. To believe the contrary connotes pride and arrogance.[1]

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*The Gita Discourses.

Communion with God

Q. Do you feel a sense of freedom in your communion with God?

A. I do. I do not feel cramped as I would on a boat full of passengers. Although I know that my freedom is less than that of a passenger, I appreciate that freedom as I have imbibed through and through the central teaching of the *Gita* that man is the maker of his own destiny in the sense that he has freedom of choice as to the manner in which he uses that freedom. But he is no controller of results. The moment he thinks he is, he comes to grief.[2]

One Thing Needful

Q. What is the meaning of मतपर: (*Gita*: XVIII-57). If God is Truth, what should be man's symbol for it? He may recite the name of Rama, but then who is Rama?

A. 'मतपर:' (one to whom I am the one thing needful) means सत्यपरायण: (one to whom Truth is the one thing needful). In this line चरणपद्मे मम चित्त निष्पन्दित करो हे। the Poet has invested Truth with a body by referring to the lotus-like feet of *Satya Narayana* (God as Truth). Truth has no form. Therefore, everyone will form such an idea or image of Truth as appeals to him, and there will be as many images of Truth as there are men. These will all be true as long as they last. For, they enable a man to obtain everything he wants. As a matter of fact, names such as *Brahma, Vishnu, Ishwara, Bhagwan* are either meaningless or at least not significant enough; whereas *Satya* (Truth) is the perfect name of God. If someone says he will die for God's sake, he cannot make plain to others what he means, and people who hear him say so will hardly understand it. On the other hand, one who says he will die for Truth, knows what he means and his words will be generally understood by those who hear him.

You ask what is Rama. I may explain to you the meaning of that word, but then your repetition of that name would be nearly fruitless. But if you understand that Rama is He whom you intend to worship and then repeat His name, it will serve the purpose of the Cow of Plenty for you. You may repeat it like a parrot, but still it will be helpful because your repetition, unlike the parrot's, is backed by a purpose. Thus you do not need any symbol, and Tulsidas holds that the name of Rama is more powerful than Rama Himself and suggests that there is no relation between the word Rama and its meaning. The meaning will be filled in later by the devotee in accordance with the nature of his devotion. That is the beauty of his repetition (*Japa*). Otherwise, it would be impossible to prove that it will make a new man even of a simpleton. The devotee must fulfil only a single condition. The name should not be repeated for show or with a view to deceiving others, but with determination and faith. If a man perseveres with such repetition, I have not the shadow of a doubt that it will be for him a Universal Provider. Every one, who has the requisite patience, can realize this in his own case. For days, and sometimes for years, the mind wanders and becomes restless, the body craves for sleep when one is engaged in repeating the Name. Indeed, even still more painful symptoms intervene. Still, if the seeker perseveres with the repetition, it is bound to bear fruit. Spinning is a gross material accomplishment, and yet it can be acquired only after our patience is sorely tried. Things more difficult than spinning demand a greater effort on our part. Therefore, he who is out to attain the Supreme, must undergo the necessary discipline for a long, long time and never be downhearted. If you have faith, repeat the Name at all times, when you sit or stand or lie down, eat or drink. There is no reason to despair if the whole of your lifetime is spent while you are at it. If you try it, you will have peace of mind in an increasing measure from day to day.[3]

GLOSSARY

Adhikara : right or qualification.
Ahimsa : non-violence; love.
Anasakti: non-attachment; selfless action.
Aparigraha : non-possession.
Asakti : attachment.
Ashrama : one of the four stages of life, *viz.*, student's, householder's forest-dweller's and that of a recluse.
Asteya : non-stealing.
Avatar : an incarnation of God.

Bhagwan : a Hindu name for God.
Bhakta : a devotee
Bhakti : devotion.
Bhangi : a scavenger; a sweeper.
Brahma : Creator of the world in Hindu mythology; God.
Brahmachari : one who observes *Brahmacharya*; a celibate.
Brahmacharya : celibacy; continence; self-restraint.
Brahmin : a member of the priestly caste among the Hindus.

Chandala : an outcaste; one who belongs to the lowest caste among the Hindus.

Dharma : religion; duty; law.

Gayatri: a *Vedic* prayer addressed to the Sun; invoction of Sun-God.
Grihasthashrama : Life of a householder.
Guna : quality; attribute.
Guru : teacher; moral preceptor.

Himsa : violence.

Ishwara : a Hindu name for God.

Jnan : knowledge; wisdom.
Jnani : a man of knowledge and wisdom.

Kalma : a Muslim formula of prayer.
Karma : action.
Karmayoga : Law of Action.
Kurukshetra : battle-field.

Lota : a vessel for carrying water.

Mahabharata : one of the two great epics of the Hindus, the other being *Ramayana*.
Mahatma : a great soul.
Mantra : a sacred verse or formula.
Maya : illusion.
Moksha : salvation; self-realization.
Muni : a sage; a recluse.

Nirvana: utter extinction of the ego or self; nothingness; Buddhist term for self-realization.
Niyams : rules.

Pandit : a learned man
Patita : a fallen or degraded being.
Purna : perfect; complete.
Puranas : books of Hindu mythology
Purusha : man.

Rajas : passion; motion; action.
Ramanama : the name of Rama—incarnation of God in Hindu religion.

Ramayana: a great Hindu Epic
Rishis: seers, sages.

Sannyasa: renunciation of worldly life.
Sannyasi: a recluse.
Sat: Being; eternal; that which exists.
Sattva: Goodness; harmony; rhythm.
Satyagraha: literally, holding on to the Truth; Truth-force soul-force; non-violent resistance.
Satyagrahi: one who practises *Satyagraha.*
Satya-Narayana: the God of Truth.
Sharir-yajna: body-labour; bread labour.
Shastras: Hindu religious scriptures.
Shastri: well-versed in scriptures.
Shloka: verse, stanza.
Shudra: a member of the labour caste among the Hindus.
Smritis: ancient Hindu law books
Sthitprajna: a man of steady wisdom.
Swadeshi: literally, belonging to one's own country; the principle of using things made locally or in one's own country.

Tamas: ignorance; sloth; inertia.
Tapas: voluntary suffering; penance.

Upanishads: sacred religious books of the Hindus.

Vaishnava: a votary of the cult of God Vishnu.
Vaishya: a member of the trader class among the Hindus.
Varna: literally means colour; a class; a caste
Varnashrama: division of the Hindu society into four occupational castes (*Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya* and *Shudra*) and four stages of life (student's, house-

holder's, forest-dweller's and that of a recluse).

Vedas: the earliest sacred scriptures of the Hindus.

Yajna: literally means worship, hence sacrifice; hence any sacrifical act or any act of service.

Yamas: cardinal virtues like non-violence, truth celibacy non stealing and non-possession.

Yoga: primarily it means uniting or joining together; the science of control of the body and the mind; proficiency in performance of action.

Yogi: one who practises *Yoga;* skillful in action.

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THE ETERNAL MOTHER

"The *Gita* is not only my ***Bible*** or my ***Quran***, it is more than that—it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago; but this Eternal Mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom.

"The *Gita* is the Universal mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to any one who knocks. A true votary of the *Gita* does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning.

It is reserved only for the humble in spirit, who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed."

M. K. GANDHI

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